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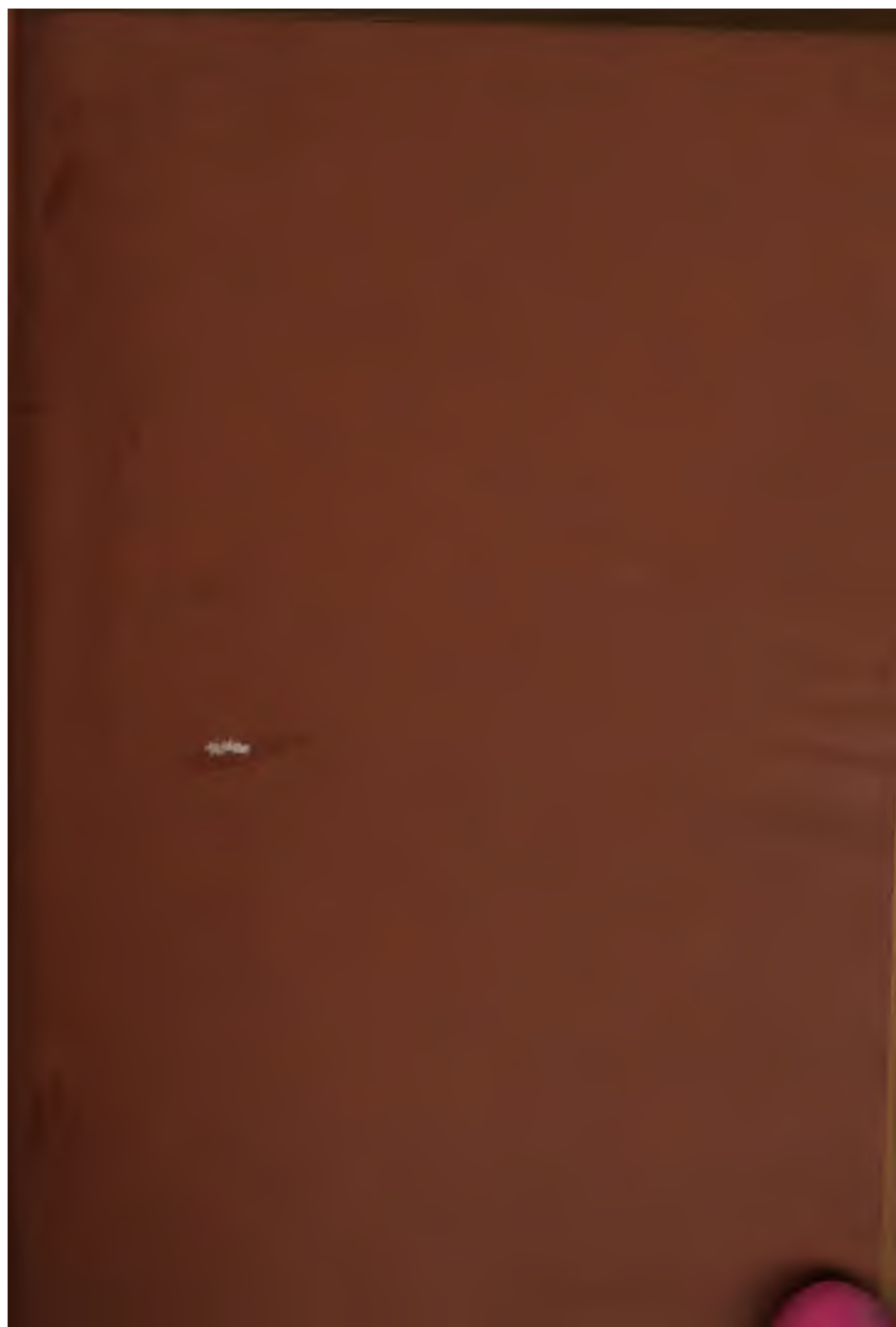
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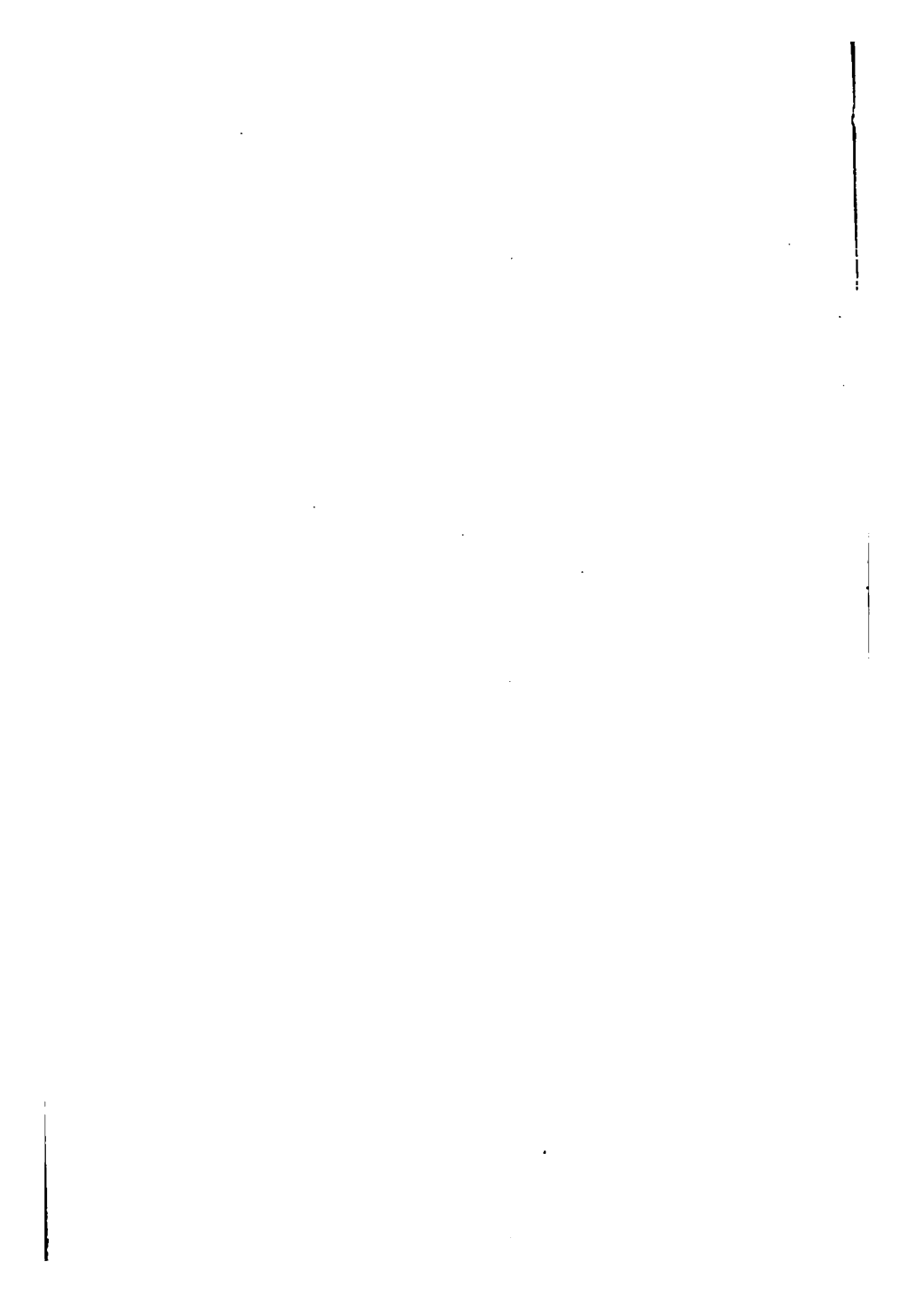


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AN IMAGINATIVE MAN



AN IMAGINATIVE MAN

BY

ROBERT S. HICHENS

AUTHOR OF THE GREEN CARNATION



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AN IMAGINATIVE MAN.

PROLOGUE.

A TALL, thin man, of about thirty-eight, stood in a prettily furnished bedroom one night of early winter, watching a woman who was praying. His eyes were dark brown, bright, and restless; a moustache and a short, pointed beard scarcely hid the lines of his mobile mouth, which smiled rather cynically. The man was clad in a loose smoking-suit, held a cigar-case in one hand, and a silver candlestick in the other; slippers were upon his feet, and the fourth edition of the *Pall Mall Gazette* was tucked under his arm.

He stood watching, and the woman, in her white nightdress, knelt on, whispering her prayers. The fire on the hearth flickered over her small figure and her dark, low-bowed head.

"I wonder why she is praying?" Henry Denison thought, still looking at his wife, and drawing his brows together in a slight frown. "Is it because

she believes in a God, or because she wishes to sound me? We have been married three months now, and we have never threshed out that very vexed question, religion. On the Sundays of our honeymoon, being in Italy, we always went to the most interesting church, architecturally, that we could find, to hear Mass. Travellers always go to hear Mass, as they go to hear the opera. But these are private prayers, and they interest me. I wonder what she is praying about?"

He moved a step forward, as if to go softly out of the room, then paused again.

"I wonder whether she is a Pharisee?" he thought, "and for a pretence makes long prayers. Or perhaps she fancies that I have gone downstairs. She cannot see; her eyes are blinded by her hands. These private prayers are fascinating. Everything that is strictly private is fascinating. Only when one has made it strictly public does the bloom vanish from the peach. The Bluebeard's chamber of the soul is, after all, the only room worth looking into. But the worst of it is that one can generally find the means of entrance to it much too easily, and often it turns out to be only a barely furnished and respectable attic after all—the sort of room a Christian mistress gives to a Christian housemaid. I have not quite got into Enid's Bluebeard's cham-

ber yet. I wonder if there are headless creatures there—bizarre monuments of her mental crimes. Let us hope so.”

And he smiled to himself with the curious whimsicality at which many of his acquaintances wondered. Since his Eton days, Henry Denison had always been dubbed an odd fellow. In mute moments, when he was alone, he often thanked the Unseen for that. To be thought odd by the ordinary seemed to him a tribute, offered, involuntarily, by the less to the greater. He was a man who considered it almost criminal to be what men call “a thorough good fellow,” an expression which he considered to mean an ingenious relater of improper stories. Mercifully, however, this last insult had not yet been offered to him. Sometimes he had waited for it with dread, but it had never come. His personality guarded him from it, and for this he was thankful.

Now, while he was smiling, his wife rose from her knees, with a sigh that parted her pretty, rosy lips. There were tears in her big, dark eyes.

Denison noticed them at once; he always noticed everything at once. To do so had become a sort of profession in his case. Were these tears caused by the uplifting of her heart?

“I thought I heard you go out, Harry,” Mrs.

Denison said; and a blush stole over the whiteness of her cheeks. She looked very young, and very little, in her elaborately-frilled nightdress, with her long hair streaming in a fluffy flood over her shoulders. "You have been watching me?"

There was just a suspicion of petulance in her tone.

"Yes. Why not? All intelligent people watch those whom they love. Passion is a private inquiry agent, with a staff of detectives to dog the mental footsteps of the adored."

"I don't know," she said doubtfully, slipping into bed, where she lay looking like a dear little dark child, adorably pretty, and a tiny bit frightened and puzzled. "Ought passion to be so thoughtful? I don't think so. Detectives are always reasoning." She glanced at him with a curious babyish pathos. "You are always reasoning, Harry. I sometimes fancy——"

She paused and hesitated.

"Yes, dear?" said her husband, twisting his cigar-case round in his hand a little impatiently.

"I sometimes fancy that if you loved me a little more you would reason about me a little less."

"Such an idea is in direct opposition to all my theories."

She moved her head restlessly upon the pillow.

AN INTERVIEW

She wanted to ask a question, but she was not
allowed.

Denison saw that in a moment.

"Ask!" he said, putting his hand up and
taken in his hand, lower down the window, and
sitting in a chair by the door. "I will never
to sleep if you don't."

"Well, then, I will," he said, "I will
detectives just now."

"Yes."

"Was there a detective following me?"

He smiled at her, and said, "I will
him."

"Did you hear his name?"

"I fancied I did."

"Did they warn you?"

"Not exactly. But I was told that
you were not so friendly."

"Then your wish is granted. I am not."

"Oh, but you are. Now I am a detective, and
she drew her arm out from under the window, and
hid her small hand in his pocket. "I will
with me if I say this. I will never
over, you know."

"Yes! That sounds a little better."

"I think them over, and I will never
a sort of disease."

Her dark eyes met his rather anxiously.

"You mean that the stupid are healthy, and that the intelligent ought to be doctored, dosed with denseness, plastered with ignorance? Would you put genius in splints, Enid, and feed talent with the water gruel of mediocrity?"

"Not that, of course, Harry. Still——"

"Still, something ought to be done for the poor sick thing. I am not sure that you are not right. A clever mind is rather like a dog with the distemper. The worst of it is that the dog may get over the distemper, but the mind never quite gets over its cleverness. It must labour on, a prey to a perpetual malaise."

"Now you are being sarcastic," she said, drawing her hand back into the bed again. "I dare say I am silly."

"No; you are wiser than you think. There is truth in what you say. But you must confess, Enid, that there are not too many dogs going about with the distemper. That should be our comfort."

"Should it?"

"Certainly. It is a most consoling reflection. And another consoling reflection is that the world is full of veterinary surgeons. The silly of society act as vets. to the brilliant, my dear, and if they

cannot always cure they can at least often kill. And that is the next best thing, isn't it?"

Enid looked rather piteously doubtful. He wondered whether she did so deliberately, because she thought it suited her, or whether the expression—which often decorated her pretty face—was not perhaps due chiefly to the shape of her arched eyebrows. Nature is sometimes an artist against whose handiwork our minds rebel in vain. We may be as merry as grigs, but if our mouth turns down decisively at the corners we can only seem sourly sinister to the outside world.

Having wondered for a moment, and decided that the shape of his wife's eyebrows probably expressed correctly her mental condition, Denison changed the conversation.

"Do your prayers make you happy, Enid?" he asked. "I have never happened to see you praying before. And you got up with tears in your eyes."

"Tears often come into my eyes when I am serious, Harry. They do not mean that I am unhappy."

"Perhaps you are like the schoolgirl who once told me that she always cried in church. She regarded it as part and parcel of the religious ceremony. Your tears were not the raindrops of etiquette, I hope?"

"No, Harry."

"I am glad of that. Etiquette is one of the seven devils that afflict society. I will tell you the names of the other six on some more reasonable occasion. But it is near midnight now, and to-morrow we start for Egypt. Go to sleep and dream that seas are always calm, and that the destroying angel, seasickness, passes over our cabin door. Good-night."

He bent down, kissed her forehead, and went softly out of the room, leaving her puzzled.

When he went softly out of her presence he nearly always left her puzzled.

"Have I found a riddle that I shall never guess?" he asked himself two minutes later, leaning over the lamp to light his cigar. "I doubt it. If only I could—if only I could happen upon some enigma that would continue to fascinate by continuing an enigma. Why are things so straight-forward? Even women are hardly difficult to read. Study their vanities and you can classify them. Teach them to be jealous and you will teach them to reveal themselves as they are. It is tiresome."

His cigar-end glowed like a red-hot coal now, and, with a puff, he sank down in his easy-chair. Cadogan Square was silent. Only occasionally he

heard a cab turn the corner of Pont Street, and rattle up to one of the red houses above which the stars shone in a clear sky. He was able to reflect quite undisturbed. The fire twinkled at him with endless geniality as he stretched his toes to it, and the warm, dark room, with its oak-panelled walls and its many bookcases, wrapped him and his meditations up cosily.

He pulled at his cigar, and his restless brown eyes roved over the broad mantelpiece, on which stood in an unblinking row the cabinet photographs of a number of women, and of two or three men.

"My enigmas," he thought on, with a slight pursing of the lips that met each other firmly, some said cynically, over his large white teeth. "My enigmas! The riddle I have puzzled over, the acrostics I once fancied it impossible to solve. I have guessed them all."

His eyes lingered on one photograph of a little dark woman with delicately-cut features and great, imaginative eyes, that peered out beneath black curving brows with the wistful expression of a plaintive dreamer. It was the photograph of his wife.

"I have married you to guess you," he said to the photograph. "That was carrying the pastime

rather far, wasn't it? Don't let me guess you just yet.'

He sighed.

"People prate so much about being able to have faith," he thought, "as if it were beautiful. They talk of the pleasure of reading a soul like an open book. No open book is worth reading. If only men and women were more incomprehensible than they are. I have never yet met with a human being whom I could not thoroughly understand after a certain period of study and detective duty. Yet I have married Enid. That was rash. But I do not quite understand her yet. What a mercy that is. Misunderstanding keeps love alive."

He struck the ash off his cigar with meditative little finger, and again ran his eyes over the photographs.

"To think that all those people really puzzled me in their time—really gave my mind a lot to do. I should like to invite them in a bunch to dinner now, and sit, as host, among the ruins of my Carthage; drink a health to the mysteries that are gone, and make a neat speech of farewell to vanished misunderstanding. It would be amusingly original. One would have the table decorated with simple daisies growing in their own grass, and each guest should be presented with a bouquet of dancing

daffodils, symbolical of my war-dance above the graves of my illusions. I should preside more in sorrow than in anger, and there should not be a single complication either of thought, or of emotion, from one end of dinner to the other.

“There would be too many women, though. Most of my enigmas have been women, naturally. The novelists are preposterously wrong when they say that every simple-minded young female, with rosy cheeks and bright eyes, can hoodwink the most subtle man who was ever born to misery; but women are certainly more complex than men. That fact accounts for the female preponderance among my photographs. I wonder why I keep them there. They have nothing to conceal from me now. I suppose I must try to think of them as ornaments, to look upon them as an anxious hostess looks upon the tall, grim men who line ball-room walls, and refuse to dance. They furnish my library to some extent, and if they refuse any longer to dance for me it is because they are afflicted with wooden legs. It is strange how those funny folks, whom the world agrees to dub sages—on the same principle, perhaps, as men name a suburban villa ‘Myrtle Grove’ or ‘Primrose Bank’—will have it that from time immemorial man has always busily employed all his leisure-time in beating himself to

death against the problems and the mysteries of life. The average man cuts mysteries as dead as he cuts an enemy. He refuses to see them. He looks upon them as bad form, and does not admit them into his society. Therefore he likes people, as a rule, and takes little notice of the speechless crowd of beings in nature and in art who are so silent and so full of things hidden. What are they to him? They cannot dress hideously, and go out into the Park. They cannot make fools of themselves and create a scandal. They are dumb, and often they are lovely; that is all. Yet they have fascinated me strangely from the first, and although I try to find man more beautiful, woman more mysterious, I fail—I usually fail utterly.

“Shall I fail with Enid? Sometimes lately I have feared so. She interested me more six weeks ago than she does now. Yet she interests me still. I have studied her among Roman ruins, and on Venetian lagoons; while I have kissed her, when I have quarrelled with her. As she slept by my side I have pursued her dreams. I have waked myself deliberately in order to see her wake in the morning and hear what her first words would be. I have drawn her on at night with arguments, and strange statements, of anything but fact, to reveal herself fully to me in the ex-

citement that the dark hours often bring in their train.

"Yet she is still, to some extent, a riddle.

"If I could know what she prays for I might know what she is. Our secret desires are our souls. I am afraid of guessing her, and yet I am always trying to guess her, laying plots for her, poor child! seeking in the most underhand ways for the right clue to her character. She evades me with a cleverness that does her infinite credit. Perhaps she has an instinct to warn her against fully betraying herself, for she loves me, and no doubt she desires to keep my love. And I believe loving women are as full of instincts as life is full of bores.

"Nevertheless, I, too, have an instinct that tells me some day the soul of Enid will be laid quite bare to me. I shall understand her. It is only a question of time. Ah! what it would be to me to discover a being with a soul that I could never understand! How I, bored and cold, and modern as I am, could love it."

For a moment his eyes glittered with a fire of excitement. He got up restlessly, threw his cigar into the fire, and turned the staring photographs with their faces to the wall.

"You tire me," he said wearily, "very much."

He paused in front of the flame with one foot resting upon the fender edge.

“Shall I ever get rid of this absurd tendency of mine towards follies brought about by the workings of the imagination?” he thought. “If the world knew of my desires, of my hidden sensations, surely it would call me a child instead of a cynic, a child—or possibly, being a kindly speaking world—a madman. Then it would laugh at me. As matters stand it is rather inclined to fear me sometimes. It thinks me odd, but not in the way in which I am odd. Why am I really so detached from people, so swiftly moved, at moments, by inanimate things, by a sound, a scent, the patter of a shower among slippery laurel leaves, the pose of a figure in an old picture? Even colours often strike me as more suggestive than words expressing thoughts. There is a life in scarlet that many men lack. There is a passion in deep orange colour that passes the passion of a thousand modern women. Sometimes I have fancied that I shall fall in love with an echo, or be enthralled by an orchid with a history in its lustrous, spotted petals. Sometimes I have dreamed that I shall beat out my life against a stone personality, that will conjure up fancies, and own no voice with which to dispel them. We lay love’s castles in ruins with our tongues, even with our movements, with

those endless repetitions of gesture, and of attitude, that men call tricks. The disembodied sound has no tricks. The statue and the picture have no words. They suggest and leave us to realize if we can. In their impotence lies their power."

A coal falling into the grate snapped the thread of his meditation.

"Riddles!" he murmured, "Riddles! Those who are dumb can never tell their secrets. And we, in society, do everything with a view to what we call conversation. What a masquerade of maniacs it all is! Yet, if a sane man got a card for the masquerade, made the dancers unmask and showed to them their real faces, the ball would break up in confusion, and the hostess, Mrs. Grundy, would deny to him the sacred name of 'gentleman.' And, stripped of that name, one is but a convict—a mere number."

He lit his candle and turned out the lamp.

"It is absurd to have an aim in life, I suppose," he said to himself. "But if I had one it should be to send Mrs. Grundy into hysterics in the midst of the preposterous puppets whom she calls her guests."

As he went out through the hall he paused for a moment. A number of trunks with labels affixed to them lay there in confusion. He bent down and read on one of the labels:

Baggage.

P. & O. S. N. Co.

LONDON TO ISMAILIA.

“To-morrow we start for Egypt. Shall I find my everlasting riddle there, I wonder?”

He smiled to himself rather drearily, and went up the carpeted stairs slowly to bed.

CHAPTER I.

"My wife is very sea-sick, thank you," Mr. Denison said to an inquiring passenger on the deck of the *Peninsular*, as the dull gray swell of the Bay sent the ship swinging down into the depths two days later. "She has a wholesome horror of conventionality, or fancies she has; but she is obliged to conform to a general rule on this occasion. She is so normal now that she has actually been unoriginal enough to request the stewardess to have her thrown overboard without unnecessary delay. I hear that fifteen other ladies have done the same since breakfast this morning. The stewardess must be getting terribly *ennuyée*."

The passenger, who was an elderly lady with a pinched face and an ascetic eye, looked at Mr. Henry Denison with a strong disapproval, such as she always displayed when she suspected latent originality in anyone. She paused for a moment as if she meditated making some able rejoinder, but finding that nothing came readily to her lips, she turned

on her low heel, and lurched indignantly towards the companion.

"She will tell everybody that I am a brute," thought Denison to himself, as he tucked his rug round him, and turned the first page of his novel. "Why will people take everything so seriously?"

And then he concentrated himself on the subtleties of passion, as elucidated by the last new woman.

The voyage soon flitted by. At Gibraltar, Mrs. Denison had sufficiently recovered herself to buy fans, with red and yellow bull-fights taking place upon them, oranges and mats.

At Malta she was as piteously lively as ever she had been in her life. As the ship drew into the harbour, and a flock of small green boats put off to it from their home beneath the shelter of the batteries, she stole her little gloved hand through her husband's arm, and became sentimental, with the gentle ease that was peculiar to her. She slipped into many moods in the course of a day, drawing them on and off as she drew on and off her gloves, but her abiding gentleness of personality coloured them all, extracted the salience from them. The gloves were precisely the same—only the buttons were different.

Henry Denison was beginning to find this out with a good deal of definiteness.

"Harry," Mrs. Denison said. "Now I am well, this seems like a second honeymoon, doesn't it? How beautiful it all is!"

"I think Malta very ugly from the sea, Enid."

"Do you, Harry? I don't. But, do you know, I think places are nothing in themselves. It is only what we feel in them that makes them beautiful or the reverse. My Aunt Fanny declares that Lucerne is hideous, because her boy was drowned in the lake there, you know. I feel so happy to-day that Malta looks to me like a Paradise."

"Rather a rocky one, my dear. Where would you like to go when we land? Malta is famous for three things—its importunate beggars, its nougat, which you buy at the 'Sick Man,' in the Strada Reale, and its orange gardens of San Antonio. The guide-books also make mention of the Chapel of the Knights."

"Oh, let us drive to the orange gardens, Harry. Never mind the chapel. We saw so many in Italy."

As they landed, she added, with a romantic accent:

"I should like to buy a little nougat, too, dear."

.

It was very cold when the *Peninsular* stole into

the bitter lake at Ismailia in the gray of the early morning. The Noah's Ark like village, with its play box trees, nestling in the white embrace of the desert, was scarcely awake, but as the great ship slowed down to a pause, and the puffing tender hustled out from the landing-stage, the sky flushed with a rose that gradually deepened to a fiery scarlet, the barren sands glowed like the pavements of heaven, and the first glimpse of Egypt that Mr. and Mrs. Denison caught, as they hurried up the companion, was a vision passionate and effective as the sunrise of joy on sorrow.

Its passion was quickly tempered by boxes, however, and a sense of owning luggage and being in danger of losing it clipped the fluttering wings of fancy, and transformed the live dove into the clay pigeon.

After breakfasting at the hotel, the Denisons strolled out up the gleaming white road, turned to the right among the date palms and apricot trees, and wandered in a desultory manner towards the sandy shores of the lake.

It was a most delicious day, hot, but not yet intemperately hot, clear as it can only be clear in Egypt at morning. Roses were flowering in the small sand gardens of the Arabs. Here and there, beneath the trees, a pale blue robe glided quietly

away, the bare feet of its owner making no sound upon the soft and shifting floor. A delicate and drowsy languor seemed to hang upon the air. It played around the minds of the Denisons with a fairy lightness while they walked slowly on, breathing a balmy sweetness that entered, as if by open windows, into their souls.

Mrs. Denison became softly reflective. In all their Italian wanderings she had never succeeded in losing the fear of her husband's smiling cynicism, which she at the same time considered Godlike and most alarming. But, then, she was one of those women who think that a deity must have a good deal of the bogey about him, and who vaguely confuse Providence with the personality of the scarecrow, frightening human sparrows away from sin by dint of an immovable ugliness that implies illimitable power. Her secret fear of her husband had spurred within her the actress instinct that lives, although perhaps dormant, in every female bosom, and she had, almost unconsciously, kept his curiosity about her at bay by the use of little subtleties of insincerity, defending herself against the scrutiny of his incessant cross-examination with an ability which had fanned the flame of his curious affection for her. She was very lovely, and he had not yet succeeded in fully understanding her. Nature had

gifted her with mysteriously dark eyes and a pretty trick of vagueness. The beauty and the vagueness caught Denison, and he appropriated them eventually at the altar. The beauty appealed certainly to his artistic sense, and to the body which he believed himself to despise. But it was the vagueness which hooked that wayward fish, his mind. In it he found a riddle. He spent his time in trying to guess it, no doubt because the guessing of it would, as he knew, slay what he chose to call his affection for Enid.

His mistake lay in supposing there was a riddle to guess. Mrs. Denison's eyes were much deeper than was her soul. She did not correspond, mentally, to her physique. Many of us do not, and that is probably why the ugly word "hypocrite" originally came into use. The face is as often the shutter of the soul as the window, and the visible sometimes rudely gives the lie to the invisible. What was visible of Mrs. Denison frequently contradicted what was invisible of her, but the world had no time to heed the squabble. Mr. Denison had time, but at present the cotton-wool of novelty filled his ears and rendered him partially deaf.

This morning, however, Mrs. Denison took the cotton-wool out. Egypt, with its clear geniality, its bright softness, its drowsy warmth, laid the actress

instinct before mentioned to sleep. The little wife was lured into forgetting the subtleties of insincerity which had stood her in good stead for so long. She had never understood her husband, but then she was so perfectly accustomed to not understanding people and things that comprehension would merely have confused her. The bewildered are never more bewildered than by their unwonted moments of intelligence. She had never understood Harry, but she did not know this, and to-day, for the first time, the desire stole into her mind that he should understand her. And so, under the date palms, where the sun kissed the shadows on the sand, she became softly reflective. She changed once again those buttons on her gloves.

They had wandered to the shore of the lake, where the wooden bathing huts hover on their piles above the still waters. Beyond the warm gold of the farther desert stretched away beneath the fiery sun. A number of goats were pattering about, their vague activity only emphasizing the sweet silence that environed this land created for lotus-eaters.

"Shall we sit down, Harry?" Mrs. Denison asked, looking up at her husband.

"Yes," he answered; "movement seems an in-

sult to Nature on such a day and in such a place as this. We have no business to worry the peace."

He spoke in an unusually gentle voice, and she noticed that his expression was curiously happy. This fact gave her courage, fitted wings to her mood, which now fluttered onward less feebly than usual.

They sat down on the sand, and let the sun have its will of them. Denison had no wish to talk. His mind was bathed in dreams, a very unusual occurrence when he was not alone. For the keynote of his character was an intense consciousness which scarcely ever left him. But Mrs. Denison had no idea that he was dreaming, or that the silence was magical. She wanted to talk, and believed that she had something beautifully definite to say.

"Harry," she began, with a gentle abruptness that was rather epileptic, "there can never be perfect love without perfect frankness, can there?"

This conversational plunge acted the part of a cold douche to the dreams of Denison. They shivered and vanished. He looked at his wife in some astonishment, and answered:

"Many people say so, Enid."

"Yes, and so it is true. My father says that

the mass of opinion on any subject is always sure to be on the right side."

"Does he?"

"That is such a comfort, because then things can't go far wrong. I often think of it when stupid people say that England is going to the dogs."

"I am glad the notion comforts you, my dear."

Mrs. Denison felt encouraged. She thought she was encouraged by her husband's words, but probably the sunshine was really the factor that brought about the feeling. She leaned against her husband's shoulder, and he was unusual enough to put his arm around her waist. This action gave to her a terrible self-confidence which usually she lacked. She moved serenely on towards her doom.

"I knew you would agree with papa, Harry," she innocently remarked, leaping at a conclusion that was founded upon no premisses. "He thinks you very clever."

"Your father is full of sound sense, Enid."

"Yes. But I wanted to talk about frankness."

"Do so, dear."

"I wanted to say—no, don't move, I like your arm there, Harry—that I wish our love to be quite perfect."

"And is it not?"

"Not quite, yet. You see perfect love casteth out fear, and I am a wee bit afraid of you, Harry."

He smiled indulgently, a thing he had scarcely ever done in his life before. It was a new experience to him.

"Are you going to cast your fear away this morning?" he said.

Enid was delighted.

"How quick you are at guessing," she remarked, with happy haste. "That is just what I want to do. I think I am afraid of you because you don't quite understand me. I fancy you are a little puzzled, sometimes, at things I say and do, you know. You love me, of course, but I think you study me too. You are always watching and observing. It has made me a little nervous of you, afraid to be quite myself."

A light of interest had flashed into Denison's bright brown eyes.

"You suspicious person," he said "And so you want me to understand you fully?"

"Yes, Harry dear."

"Do you believe that is possible? Do you believe that any human being can completely understand another?"

"Oh, yes, I think I can quite understand you."

Denison's indulgent smile became once more cynical.

"I am glad you feel that confidence," he said. "Well, put me into an equally enviable position with regard to you. It is not fair that I should be handicapped in the race for matrimonial happiness."

"I will try," Enid answered, and for the first time she faltered a little. "It is difficult," she added, after a moment's pause.

"A confession of faith is always difficult, but perhaps less difficult than a confession of failure. You have understood me from the first. Let me understand you at the last."

But now Enid faltered still more obviously. The position seemed to her to have changed in some subtle way, and instead of feeling like a happy wife on the way—led by her own acumen—to greater happiness, she felt like a nervous witness mounting into the box to give an account of herself, full of dates. She began to experience Mrs. Cluppins's need of a smelling-bottle containing half a pint of salts. But her husband did not act the part of the worthy Mrs. Bardell. He only watched her rather quizzically.

"You have given me your heart," he said, as she was silent. "Give me your soul. I assure you I wish to have it."

"I want you so much to understand me," she said at length, lowering her eyes. "But I don't know how to make you."

"I am beginning to think that perhaps I do understand you. Your wish to be understood is a key to unlock the mystery."

She let her pretty head fall upon his shoulder, and murmured :

"Everyone wants to be understood, Harry."

"Especially women," he said. "But they dress their souls up in feathers and flowers all the same, and follow such strange fashions in feeling that I often wonder why the ladies' papers do not devote a weekly column to the description of the smart shops at which customers can buy modish thoughts and becoming sensations."

"I should not read it, dear, for I think I am very simple. I have wanted to tell you so for a long time, especially since the night you saw me praying. You wondered what I was praying for."

"Yes."

Her face flushed as she said :

"I was praying that you might give up studying me, and have more time left to love me in."

His face contracted, but she did not see it, and he bent down and kissed her.

"There is so little in me to study," she said.

"And so much in you to love," he answered.
"From this moment I shall give up studying you,
and sink the detective in the husband."

Enid pressed his arm, and looked up into his
face with her beautiful dark eyes. Men spoke of
them in Hyde Park.

"I thought you were going to say the lover,"
she whispered.

"I will say so," he replied.

And he did so.

But all the time he felt inclined to seize Enid by
her soft white throat, and cry :

"You fool, why have you allowed me to under-
stand you ?"

CHAPTER II.

THE afternoon train that runs between Ismailia and Cairo rattled heavily through the desert in the sun. The windows of the carriages were closed in order to keep out the sand, which, nevertheless, filtered in surreptitiously, and spread itself in a gritty veil over hats, clothes, cushions, woodwork, everything.

Mr. and Mrs. Denison sat opposite to one another. Enid, shrouded in the voluminous gauze trappings that the travelling Englishwoman so tenaciously affects, was engaged in reading one of those Christmas numbers which give the lie to the old carol, and make that festive season come not once, but twice a year. Denison leaned back in his corner with closed eyes, as if asleep.

The other occupants of the carriage were a lady of thirty-eight or forty, and a tall boy of about twenty, whose dead white face, glittering dark eyes, and frightful emaciation, showed him to be one of those sad travellers who will not face death at home,

but who seek the destroyer in some foreign country far from all they have known in the days of health and hopefulness. The occasional conversation of these two people proved that they were mother and son. They talked in snatches, uneasily, unhappily. The mother strove to interest the boy in this strange desert, new to him, called his attention to the passing camels, to the curious scrub that does duty for woods, to those antique, biblical figures of Arabs that so absolutely recall conventional pictures of patriarchs. Her remarks proved her intelligent, odd, an impressionist in words, and a woman who had the unusual strength of mind to strike against the three-and-six-penny tyranny of the guide-book. But the son took very little notice of her remarks. With a sinister expression he stared out of the window, occasionally passing a silk handkerchief wearily over his thin face, and moistening his dry lips with his tongue. The shadow of despair lurked behind the glitter in his eyes.

Denison, who usually noticed everything, was to-day preoccupied. His eyes were closed, but he was not sleeping; he had merely closed them to protect himself from any remarks which Enid might have to make. She was one of those women who are apt to be talkative at the wrong time. Now would have been quite the wrong time in her hus-

band's opinion. He was revolving the scene of the morning—the scene by the sand-hills of the Suez Canal.

So he had made a mistake. He had been taken in with an abominable completeness, snared by Nature's drawing of a pair of eyebrows, Nature's painting of a pair of eyes. There was mystery in the face of his wife. There was depth in it. One would even have said that there was thoughtfulness—a sweet variety of reflectiveness, seldom found in the faces of the masqueraders who dance so frivolously upon the crust that covers the volcano of eternity. Dark beauty generally suggests a certain amount of mystery, as a sunset sky suggests infinity. To judge Enid by her eyes she might well be infinite; but to judge Enid by her eyes would be to do her a grave injustice. That was the devil of it. Her sudden desire to be understood had made Denison aware that there was practically nothing in her to be misunderstood. In some women so frank a statement of simplicity as that made by Enid would have implied a subtlety masked by that very statement. But it was, unfortunately, impossible for Denison to believe that she had been giving an impersonation for his benefit that morning. There is a difference between absolute naked Nature and the most perfect art of imitation—a difference discoverable by

the acutely observant ; and Denison knew, to his infinite vexation, that his wife had not been playing a part. The truth had been in her. She was not one of those women who love footlights—who dance with sad hearts, or play tragedies with merry ones. She was no mimic of voices not her own, no impersonator of moods that never seized upon her own soul. She was, as she had said, a simple woman. And those who deny that any woman can be simple are wrong. There are female simpletons as well as male.

Denison knew that he had married one. As he sat with his eyes shut, and felt the rough touch of the sand upon his eyelids, he realized it fully.

“Yes,” he thought ; “she is merely one of those women with convictions instead of thoughts, beliefs instead of desires, a country parish woman masquerading as a London beauty. Her mind is really gray wool, which she is forever knitting into a pattern to be seen in every shop. And I thought her a strange being because her eyes are strange, and she has a graceful trick of vagueness. I dare say Joan of Arc was vague, too. A tiresome martial being, whose hallucinations led to battles. I have classified Enid at last, without further hope of a blessed mistake. Her little vagaries will all be painfully plain to me now. I shall never hold my

breath again, never hope that she will be incomprehensible at the eleventh hour. The parish mind will always put its ugly head above the shallow waters that I have been fool enough to believe unfathomable, and stocked with strange monsters. Of course Enid has her moods, like all women; but there will always be that awful groundwork, that fatal foundation, upon which I shall feel that I can safely build. Yes, that is the devil of it!"

Just at this not very cheerful moment in his reflections the voice of the dark boy in the opposite corner intruded itself upon his mind.

The voice said, "I think it's a horribly ugly country, and I hate this hot sunshine in winter. Probably Jim's out hunting now. I wonder whether there was a meeting to-day, and where it was. Sywell, perhaps. Hang this sand!"

Cessation of speech was followed by an angry sigh.

Then the mother's voice said:

"We shall soon be in Cairo, dear. And I know you will like Mena House. They have a lot of horses in the stables there; good ones, too. Lord Shafton told me so."

"Lord Shafton knows a good horse," said the boy, more cheerfully. "He's a thorough nice fellow."

Denison felt himself smiling at the British deduction. It struck him, as it had often struck him before, that he had the mind of a foreigner. He never felt more utterly detached than when he was with his own countrymen. For the moment he forgot the simplicity of Enid in listening to the rapid expression of a nature new to him, and yet so old and customary. The minds of British boys always seemed to him as much alike as the articles exposed for sale on the sixpenny stall at a village bazaar, where you may see five hundred things, all slightly different, but all obviously worth the sum of threepence, squatting in a brotherhood of cheapness before the appraising eyes of intent bumpkins.

The fact that he had his own eyes shut gave the conversation to which he listened a peculiar distinctiveness. The voice of the boy was as the voice of all British boyhood; the voice of the mother as the voice of all motherhood, or so each seemed at first.

"I wonder when I shall be able to hunt again," the boy went on with fretful retrospection. "I used to have such jolly runs with the Pytchley. I hate to think of anyone riding Zoé, except me."

"Nobody will ride her. I gave orders that she was never to be mounted till—till you came back."

In saying the last words the voice of the speaker became suddenly lower.

"That's good of you, mater," the boy said, almost with vivacity. "Poor old girl. To think of her exercising in a horse-cloth, and us out here in Sahara, or whatever they call it. Everything is deucedly brutal."

"You'll get to like Egypt, Guy, in time."

"Not I. No fellow likes his prison, and I never cared for what people call picturesque places. They are always places where there's nothing on earth to do. I know all about them. Give me a sporting country, and let artists and poets go hang. I hate chaps that maunder by the yard, and couldn't sit a horse over a bullfinch to save their souls."

The tone of his voice suggested that he believed himself to be engaged in a heated argument with somebody. The mother changed the subject.

"You can go to the races," she said. "They are in December."

"Yes, that'll be something to do." He paused, then suddenly remarked, in a curiously sinister manner, "Depend upon my making the time a merry one, if it is short."

Denison opened his eyes. His silent comparison of this boy's mind to the sixpenny bazaar articles

seemed to him entirely inappropriate. And he wanted to look at him again.

He did so, and was struck by the remarkably vivid expression upon the thin face, whose yellowish whiteness was such a keen contrast to the dark eyes and curly black hair. The whole mask was illuminated by an intense determination, that even slightly contorted the aristocratic young features, and gave evidence of considerable, even of unusual, character; but it was a determination that was altogether the reverse of high-minded. There was none of the elevation of strength about it, only strength's bizarre brutality. A concentration of mind was apparent in the expression that was supremely unboyish, and, consequently, to Denison, immediately attracting. British boyhood was not generally like this.

The mother was probably cut to the heart. She winced for a moment, as an animal winces from the stroke of a whip. But she was one of the clever women who understand that in concealment of pain lies sometimes pain's opiate. After a minute of silence she said quietly :

"We shall have to be out here four months at least. Spring in Egypt is delicious, and Cairo is very gay in spring. Yes, I dare say we shall be lively enough, and you will see what a really cosmopolitan society is like."

"I didn't mean that, mater," the boy said sullenly. "And you know it. However, it doesn't matter what I meant."

And after that he began again to stare out of the window in gloomy silence.

Denison had gained an impression of him by this time that was very definite. Among the many curious problems over which he had pondered in the long hours of thought in which alone he felt himself to be really and fully living, one often recurred, partly perhaps because it was morbid, the problem of what direction the average mind would turn in when full in sight of death—of death not immediate, and whose approach had not yet drawn all power of action from the body. Would the average mind become paralyzed, as the rabbit before the snake, and merely remain motionless? Would it, on the contrary, proceed quietly on its usual way? Or would it execute a violent turn, and, if so, towards what? Of course, Denison knew it to be generally accepted as a fact that approaching death almost invariably brings with it a strong desire for the consolations of religion, but he was, by temperament, averse to receiving generally accepted things as facts, and he certainly was disinclined to receive this.

He had gained a very definite impression of what this boy, whom he did not know, was like now, but

he found himself wondering what he had been like, or seemed like, before this visitation of sickness had come upon him. Was his nature merely intensified by illness, forced on more violently in an accustomed direction, or was it changed? Was it about to enter upon a new path? That it meant to step out with an unnatural vigour was obvious. As weakness steals upon the body, something invisible often digs spurs into the emotions, lashes the imagination into a blood-tinged foam. The body falters, but the feelings gallop, until the noise of their impetuous advance attracts the attention, perhaps appals the serenity of the healthy who are standing by. Denison thought he could hear the faint beginning of the rush of this boy's mind, just starting, it might be, upon an enthralling onward course, that would, he fancied, become eventually headlong.

"Do you think you could buy me an orange through the window, Harry?" he heard his wife's voice saying plaintively. "I am so thirsty that I cannot resist being vulgar."

"It would be vulgar to resist," he said, as he complied with her request.

It seemed to him at the moment that his wife was always asking him to buy oranges through the window when he was engrossed in something really interesting. Poor Enid! As a matter of fact, she

had never eaten an orange in her husband's presence before. She was very happy that afternoon, because she believed herself at last fully understood. The desert sands looked fertile to her, the camels models of beauty and grace. And when, towards sunset, leaning from the window, she caught sight of the Pyramids far away, soaring, as it seemed to her excited imagination, to the rose colour of the exquisite sky, she pronounced them "lovely," and was astonished when Harry smiled with his usual air of slightly amused sarcasm.

CHAPTER III.

A FEW days later the Denisons were driving in an arabeeyah over the Kasr-el-Nil bridge of Cairo *en route* to the Pyramids, where they intended to spend the day, returning in the evening to the Continental Hotel. The sun was bright upon the crowded river. Few clouds had come over from the Suez Canal to spread irritation through the hearts of tourists. The usual motley throng poured along the road that skirts the Nile towards the wonderful acacia avenue that leads to the desert—strings of camels with their *bouleversée* expression, squatting women on trotting donkeys, bearded men in turbans walking hand in hand and gravely discoursing, impudent brown donkey-boys full of Eastern blandishment. The clear air was alive with voices, and the Denisons contributed a desultory chatter from their carriage, as their coachman skirmished through the mob with a perpetual shout of “Oo-ah!”

“I feel like Mrs. Brown,” Mr. Denison said, as he glanced about him. “Turkeys are so much *en*

évidence. I wish one could travel without being a tourist. One's sense of degradation is so terrible. But one might as well wish to go into society without being bored. To visit the Pyramids and the Sphinx for the first time is as humiliating as a new birth would be. By the way, Nicodemus asked very stupid questions sometimes. There are obviously so many ways of being born again when one is old."

"I think it is very exciting," said his wife.

"It is too much like coloured prints. Camels seem to make everything Biblical. And then, Enid, do you not feel a cold terror at approaching one of the wonders of the world? You go to see it and take your personality with you. That is the mistake. You try to feel breathless before it, and know all the time you are thinking that the lunch at the hotel is certain to be bad, or that the sun is inartistically hot."

"Oh, Harry! But it is easy to put up a parasol."

"A parasol won't shield you from the glare of a really bad lunch, my dear. I am absolutely dreading the Sphinx. I have heard about its 'defaced majesty' for years. Its glorious ugliness was a kind of household word in my family, and household words make family life ungrammatical.

Hundreds of thousands of tourists have been overcome with awe by it. I feel certain that my nerves will play me a trick when I see it, and that I shall burst out laughing, to my eternal disgrace."

"In *Punch* it looks wonderful," said Mrs. Denison.

"But in *Punch* everything looks wonderful," he replied, concealing a smile.

"I believe it is like a live thing," she went on—"a live thing with a secret."

"The Sphinx and the riddle!" Denison said. "Conceive a stone face that suggests, Why does a miller wear a white hat?"

"Oh, Harry, you will spoil everything if you go on like that."

"It was flippant and unfair. We ought to give the Sphinx a chance of duly impressing us. Besides, the facetious tone of mind should be the peculiar property of the lowest forms of humanity. It degrades its possessor to a level far below the beasts of the field. Yes, we will do our best to enjoy the Sphinx. At any rate we shall not be so bored by it as the unfortunate creatures who stay at the Mena House Hotel. It is amazing that anybody can deliberately elect to keep house with one of the wonders of the world. Apart from the indecency of the intrusion, the perpetual effort to be

up to the mark must be so terrible. Never ask me to stay at the Pyramids, Enid. I could not talk Sphinx for a week."

"Very well, Harry."

And then they drove out of the acacia trees into the clamorous atmosphere that rustles round the great Pyramid.

"We will lunch first, and then visit the wonder of the world," Denison said. "Our minds will be less preoccupied after we have fully tested the hotel cook."

When they came out from lunch into the sun, a huge party of personally-conducted tourists was making for the Great Pyramid in a shouting procession, and the Denisons, perched upon donkeys, and attended by an ostentatious suite of explanatory Arabs, followed in its wake at an uneasy trot.

They drew up under the Pyramid, surveyed its dusty bulk, commented on the daring travellers who were crawling up it like flies, and then rode on towards the Sphinx.

Henry Denison was in his most sarcastic mood. Sight-seeing always roused him to cynicism. He declared that great achievements drew out the dregs of human nature, and instanced some of the remarks made by the personally-conducted tourists beneath the Pyramid.

"Even a serious and intelligent man like myself," he said to his wife, "is influenced to the most petty actions and remarks by anything stupendous. Do you know, Enid, that all the time I was looking at the Pyramid I was repeating under my breath, 'This is the house that Jack built.' It was only by an effort that I prevented myself from quoting the whole imbecility by heart. Did you hear that old lady say, 'It's a comical-lookin' structure'? Structure was the word, Enid; and her husband replied, 'What a strange people these Egyptians must have been!' I am quite in the mood to laugh at the Sphinx."

His wife looked openly shocked.

"Please don't, Harry," she said. "It would be such bad form—wouldn't it?—with these Arabs here. You see, it belongs to them in a way, and they might be hurt."

"Ah, well, we mustn't depreciate their property, must we? So this"—as their donkeys sidled round the edge of a deep sand basin—"is the marvel? Shall we dismount to respectfully observe it?"

He helped Enid off her saddle, and they stood looking in silence. In the distance confused exclamations and shouts of laughter rose from the approaching tourists. But here, for the moment, they were undisturbed. Denison had dissuaded all

their attendant Arabs, except two, from accompanying them beyond the Pyramid, and these were crouching in their pale blue robes beside the meditative donkeys, too much bored by the Sphinx even to explain it, or point out its supposed merits.

Till the tourists arrived, the Denisons could enjoy a sense of solitude. They gazed at the couchant monster, which seemed to take no sort of heed of them. Mrs. Denison had her guide-book in her hand, and she now began to refer to it.

"The Arabs call it 'Aboo-el-Hôl,' the Father of Terror or Immen—" she said; but she was interrupted by her husband.

"Hush!" he said in a low voice, laying his hand upon her arm.

She was silent for a moment, wondering. The sun was very hot over the sand, and she put up her white parasol lined with pale green. A lizard ran over the base of the monster with careless impudence, paused for a second or two to enjoy the warmth, then disappeared into the shadow. Mrs. Denison began to fidget with one of her long gloves. She glanced at her husband.

He was standing by her side, apparently absorbed in contemplation. She thought he had turned very pale.

"Do put up your umbrella, Harry," she said; "you look as if you were going to have sunstroke. Well, dear, what do you think of it? I must say I agree with you about being disappointed in things. It is much uglier than I expected. I liked it better in *Punch*."

She gained no answer. Her husband did not appear to hear her. His eyes were fixed. She thought he began to look strangely unlike himself.

"Harry, Harry," she said, "are you ill? Harry!——"

"Don't interrupt us," he answered in a peculiar voice, low and level.

Mrs. Denison became seriously alarmed. She really feared sunstroke now. She caught at the white umbrella which her husband carried, with the intention of putting it up, but at this moment one of their donkey-boys created a diversion, and effectually roused Denison from his extraordinary abstraction.

This boy, tired of sitting in the sun, or driven by thoughts of "backsheesh," had risen from the ground and joined them. He had picked up some small stones out of the sand, and now, idly swinging to and fro on his bare, brown feet, he lifted up his arm and aimed one at the Sphinx.

As the stone flew through the shimmering air,

Denison turned suddenly round. His face was distorted with anger. With one fierce bound he leaped upon the amazed Arab, struck him with his closed fist on the side of the head, and rolled him over in the sand. The boy sprang up, and, with a shrill wail of terror and a burst of tears, tore off in the direction of the Great Pyramid, causing confusion in the ranks of the approaching tourists, into the midst of whom he bolted as if pursued by a demon.

Mrs. Denison shrank away from her husband in absolute fear. His excitement seemed intense. His face was suffused with unwonted colour, and his breath was laboured and irregular, while his fingers worked as if they were at the boy's throat.

"Harry! Harry!" she cried piteously, on the verge of a flood of tears. "What is it? Oh! what is it?"

"How dared he? How dared he?" Denison exclaimed in a choked voice, looking after the Arab, who was now evidently relating his tale, with a frenzy of gesture, to the camel-drivers and donkey-boys who attended the tourists.

"Why, Harry, he only threw a stone, and not at anyone."

"Enid, you don't know what you're saying," he began, and then a change came over him. He ap-

peared abruptly to recollect himself. The flush died out of his face. One of his habitual cold smiles hovered on his lips. "Is it the lunch, or the sun, or both?" he said. "The boy aggravated me. He interrupted my magnificent meditations on—the miller and the white hat. Here he comes in the midst of the condemnatory tourists. Well, a five-piastre piece will heal his wounds, no doubt."

He felt in his pocket, produced the coin and held it out to the boy, who was still crying and excitedly gesticulating, giving a dramatic and violent pantomime of the Englishman's brutal assault upon his person.

At the sight his tears ceased to flow. He ventured gingerly forward, and, when he found the money actually within his grasp, became all smiles and affectionate geniality. Bursting into conversation with a vivacity overwhelming, he helped Denison upon his donkey and ran along at his side, entertaining him with a thousand energetic compliments, and declaring in a shrill voice that he loved the "nice man" better than his right eye (his only good one).

But Enid was not so easily soothed.

The outbreak had been so inexplicable, so entirely unlike her husband, that she was still in a nervous flutter, and disinclined to let the affair rest.

As they rode on towards the hotel she tried to probe the matter to the bottom.

"What was it, dear?" she asked. "It is no use your pretending to me that you are feeling well. I am sure the sun has affected your head. We ought not to have started directly after luncheon."

"I am perfectly well, Enid, I assure you."

"Now, Harry, you can't deceive me. I understand you too thoroughly. You are ill, and you are afraid of telling me."

Denison's calm threatened to be disturbed.

"Do allow me the luxury of a mood sometimes," he said. "I am as well as I ever was in my life. It is extremely tiresome to have stones whizzing past your head when you are conscientiously trying to be orthodox."

He paused; then, with a light laugh, and in a less irritable tone, he added:

"But for this wretched boy, I might for once have done the right thing, and trembled before the Sphinx, like a true British tourist."

"Then you do admire it?"

"How can I tell? I might have thought it fine, although, as you say, *Punch* has improved upon it. Here we are at the hotel! Now for backsheesh and tea."

As they sat down in two rocking chairs on the

veranda, they noticed not far from them the woman who, with her son, had travelled with them from Ismailia to Cairo. She was sitting alone in a beehive chair, and Mrs. Denison's feminine eyes quickly gathered the fact that the white gown she wore became her, and that her thick, straight eyebrows and vivacious eyes were marvellously picturesque beneath the shadow of a large white hat. She was reading a French novel, and occasionally looked up from it to cast an expectant glance down the road. Mr. Denison, too, observed her, and, as he sipped the tea which had been brought out to them by a Swiss boy in a white linen jacket, he remarked to Enid :

"Our fellow-travellers are keeping house with the Sphinx."

"Yes. How handsome she is !"

"Enid, you are not a true woman."

"Why, Harry ?"

"You can admire your sister women."

"It is only men who think women live in a perpetual atmosphere of envy."

"And only women who think men live in a perpetual atmosphere of selfishness. Why are the sexes so unable to observe each other's virtues ? They are like colour-blind people. They see what is not and ignore what is. They insist upon it that

shining white natures are dull gray, as the impressionist insists that trees are mauve, and seas are scarlet. No women are envious. No men are selfish."

"Will you have some sugar, Harry?"

"No, thank you."

They sat silent for awhile, enjoying the sunshine. The tea was very good, and their tour of inspection had been tiring, and inclined them to lethargy. Endless comedies, too, were being enacted before their eyes—comedies of sight-seeing in which half the nationalities of the world seemed to play parts. The white-robed Pyramid Arabs were reaping their harvest from English, French, Italians, Russians, Germans, and scenes of protest, indignation, fury and fear succeeded each other in rapid succession, the sun and the sand providing a glowing *mise en scène*, and the Great Pyramid an imposing background. Occasionally the babel of demand and expostulation was interrupted by a wail of alarm, as a saddle slipped and a stout lady, or elderly gentleman, bit the dust.

The Denisons sipped their tea, and watched, until the sharp gallop of a horse struck through the uproar. The tourists who were lounging about in the wide space before the hotel scuttled for safety, and a reckless rider dashed up, his animal white

with foam. As he threw himself out of the saddle, and stumbled up the steps on to the veranda, Denison recognised the dark boy who had roused him to interest in the railway carriage.

The boy made for the place where his mother was sitting, flung himself down beside her, and began to talk excitedly, gesticulating with his crop. His thin face was violently flushed and his eyes shone unnaturally. She laid her hand in his, and seemed trying to soothe him, and presently she got up, put her arm through his, and went with him slowly into the hotel.

One or two men smoking on the veranda exchanged smiling glances.

Denison turned to his wife and began once more to talk. Evidently two or three times he tried to force himself to say something and shied away from it. That was obvious from the unexpected, though adroit, turn he gave to more than one of his sentences, begun to express a desire or an intention that was lost in a commonplace, and alien, finale.

At last, when their arabeeyah came round to the door, and he was paying the bill to a preternaturally pale Swiss waiter, who told them that he spent his winters in Egypt and his summers at Zermatt, Denison remarked in a casual way that was not free from a suspicion of elaboration :

"They serve you very well at this hotel, Enid."

"Yes, indeed," said his wife, who had enjoyed her tea after the sun, the sand, and the fracas.

"Do you think—what do you say to our paying a little visit here?"

"Do you mean to-morrow—for the day again?"

"No; I thought we might stay for a couple of nights or so."

"But we have our rooms at the Continental?"

"That is easily arranged."

He spoke with a certain amount of pressure.

"We might engage our rooms before we start," he added.

"But I thought you particularly objected to staying here, Harry? You said I must not propose it because of——"

"I was only joking. That fatal facetious tone of mine was upon me. This hotel is charming. Shall I take rooms?"

"Yes, dear, if you like. But——"

He had vanished through the doorway before her sentence was finished.

Mrs. Denison, left alone, glanced round instinctively to find a reason for this new departure of her husband. As she did so the handsome woman in the big white hat came slowly out, alone, and sat down once more in her beehive chair. She still

held the French novel in her hand, but her eyes were staring straight in front of her. She was not reading.

"How young she looks to have a grown-up son," Mrs. Denison thought. "How young!"

And then, suddenly, a very faint awakening of jealousy stirred in the little wife's heart. Had she found the reason she was seeking? Her husband's manner had been adroit, but furtive.

CHAPTER IV.

NEXT day found Mrs. Denison, still puzzled and a trifle suspicious, installed at the Mena House Hotel, with her husband. It was early in the season, and the hotel was by no means full. A few invalids had already settled there for the winter, as well as several English and Americans who were resting after their long journey out, before starting up the Nile. Denison took them in with his observant eyes during the first day, and decided that he didn't want to know any of them, with two exceptions. He had never loved his kind, and never even followed the humane fashion of pretending to love them. The interest that he took in men and women had been, was still at rare intervals, keen, but it was scarcely kindly. Their foibles attracted him sometimes, their virtues seldom. It amused him to observe them under circumstances of excitement, terror, or pain, at a climax of passion or of despair. He often said :

“We are only interesting when we are not our-

selves. When we are ourselves we are as God has made us. And God has made us very dull."

The virtues of human nature scarcely appealed to him at all, but human nature's vagaries occasionally stirred him from the languor of cynicism in which he was plunged. He liked people when they lost their heads, when they became abnormal. Anything bizarre attracted him unnaturally, but the bizarre is not a prevailing element in modern life, especially in modern tourist life. Travelling humanity reeks of the guide-book. Travelling conversation repeats itself with a parrot-like persistence. In Cairo the battle-cry is the bazaars. At Mena House the stream of talk flows everlastingly around the Pyramids and the Ghizeh Museum. The chatter at *table d'hôte*, in the great cool room with the domed roof and the lattices, was of Egypt's details, its temples, tombs, and donkey-boys, its dancing girls and dervishes, its dahabeahs, and its mummies. But who, among all the chatterers, felt the solemnity of the land, heard its hollow echoes, listened to its whispering voices of the past, saw the shadows that crept across its sands, the ghosts that had their dwellings among its ruins.

Denison would have liked to be alone in Egypt. Since solitude was impossible, he arranged with the head waiter that he and Enid should be placed at

dinner next to the dark boy of the railway journey and his mother. In their faces he seemed to read unusual sentences, sentences that promised a serial story, whose interest might deepen as it progressed. He knew instinctively that they would not bore him. The boy, in mind and body, was in a condition of turmoil. His shattered health had obviously reacted on his brain. There was nothing of the breezy British sanity, which Denison was so weary of, about him. The shadows in his eyes, even the movements of his thin hands, of his drawn mouth, revealed a curious inward excitement that was driving him forward at an increasing pace. Amid the chattering crowd he moved, to Denison's thinking, in a detachment full of secret horror. Yet his vivacity was incessant and wild. The impression Denison gained of him, before he spoke to him, was of spring suddenly seized by the hands of autumn, covered with dry, rustling, dead leaves, but struggling from its shroud, and stretching out violent hands after the flowers and the pomp of summer. The rustle of those dead leaves was very loud in Denison's ears. He wanted to take them up in his hands as the miser takes up gold pieces, to let them slip through his fingers, to feel the dryness of them, and note the fading mystery of the hues with which they were dyed. He wanted to do this merely in

order to solace for himself the *ennui* attendant on public meals in a strange hotel. So he arranged that Enid and he should sit cheek by jowl with Mrs. Aintree and her son.

At their first dinner he sat between his wife and Mrs. Aintree. Enid's attention was soon engrossed by one of those born tourists, who live for ever in their boxes, and talk for ever of different railway-stations and hotels. He heard her skipping from one country to another with the laboured agility of anxious politeness—now in Buenos Ayres, now at the lakes of Killarney, plunged in Japan, or immersed in the wilds of Wales, bridging continents with a sentence, and circling the round globe with an agitated epigram. Then he turned to Mrs. Aintree, hoping for something better than an incorrect summary of all the geographies ever written.

She congratulated him on exchanging the air of Cairo for that of the desert.

"I feel a different creature since I have been here," she said. "There is little to do, but so much to breathe. The air is like champagne, and yet even the teetotalers approve of it. I suppose they try to get as near things forbidden as they can, like so many of us."

"Is anything forbidden in the East?" Denison asked. "I thought the charm of sinning had van-

ished because the veto on it was removed. In London even virtue seems sinister, but out here vice is decked in a gay blue robe and an orange-coloured girdle, and dances openly to a pipe instead of clinging to the skirts of secrecy."

"London is rather like Mr. Stiggins," she answered. "It preaches in public, and drinks pineapple rum in private."

"But the world is beginning to mark the red nose and to suspect the bar-parlour. Yes, I am afraid London will have to give up its ostrich-like attitude at last. Its head has been in the sand long enough, and Paris and Vienna are beginning to sneer at the large view of tail feathers that cannot be ignored. Even a city should not keep on telling the same lie for ever."

"The Arabs cannot be accused of sameness in lying. Untruth is really a fine art with them. The pitch of perfection to which the dirtiest donkey-boy has brought deceit commands my homage."

"Beasts! They're always trying to do you," broke in her son. "What would an English groom think of them?"

"Does an English groom ever think at all?" Denison said.

"If he is worth his salt he thinks of his horses and his harness on week-days, and of his sweetheart

on Sundays," said Mrs. Aintree, helping herself to some boiled Nile fish.

"I believe in the reverse of that," said Denison, not at all because he meant it, but merely for the sake of elucidating his companion. "It is much better to think of one's sweetheart all the week, and to devote a short Sunday to the grooming of the tiresome necessary horse, and the polishing of the tiresome necessary harness."

"The old doctrine of the pleasure-seeker," she replied, with a certain light impertinence that was rather invigorating.

"And a jolly good doctrine too," put in the boy with a sort of angry, determined eagerness, looking hard across his mother at Denison with an expression that seemed suddenly to claim him as a "pal." "A short life and a merry one, that's what I say."

"But the so-called merry life is often so short that it is hardly worth calling a life at all, Guy," she said, not in the least as if she were trying to preach at him.

The relations between them were, as Denison began to note, scarcely the usual ones of mother and son. She wore a curious air of youth and emancipation—of youth that was nevertheless not young because it was happy, but rather because it contained an ineradicable elasticity, and might even

be grief-stricken without losing its tendency to leap instead of hobbling. The dreary sobriety of the forties had not settled, like a mist, over her, although she had just passed her thirty-ninth birthday. There was an acute *bonhomie*, tinged with the instinctive appreciation of drama that vivifies the mind, in her personality. It marked her a delightful woman of the world. She had obviously not followed the pitiable example of so many women, who relapse upon maternity as on a feather-bed, in which they sink down until the outline of mind is entirely concealed by a bulging mass of fluff and feathers. Motherhood, in her case, was an ornament that she wore with a grace, not a pair of slippers down at heel in which she shuffled through life. In secret she might cherish it as a valuable jewel. In public she had the manner of thinking no more of it than she thought of the earrings in her ears, or the bracelet upon her arm. And this pleasant attitude of her mind had not been without its effect upon her son. He did not fall perpetually into the filial pose before her, a pose that is often beautiful, but that may become too habitual, and, like any habitual pose, induce a constraint that eventually tends towards cramp. He looked upon her apparently as a companion rather than as a lady who, having brought him into the world, was bound to occupy all her

spare time in pointing the showman's staff at the panorama of life and crying, "That's what you are not to look at—and that—and that."

Before dinner was over, Denison knew that the boy seldom practised the art of concealment upon her, and that she possessed the particular knowledge not one mother in fifty possesses—the knowledge of what her son, her own flesh and blood, was really like; what he thought and did, what made him so think and so act. Mrs. Aintree had never learnt the fatal lesson that weighs down so much virtue with chains, and renders so much goodness wholly inoperative. She had never learned how to be shocked.

This unusual ignorance—many called it unfeminine—had, from time to time, set the tongue of slander wagging against her. But somehow she was apt to forget that slander had a tongue, or to ignore the fact if she remembered it.

In reply to her remark on the dwarf-like stature of merry lives, Guy Aintree exclaimed, with the wild vehemence over apparently small things that set him apart from the rest of this hotel world:

"Well, mater, and how are we to help that? You can't say. Why's one horse a roarer and another a Derby winner?"

"That's a question I can't answer, old boy. But

I can tell you this—that the roarer shouldn't try to race."

There was a sort of edge on the tone in which she spoke the last words that made them cut, but like the surgeon's operating knife, not like the assassin's dagger. She added quietly:

"And some lives are merely short because they are merry. They are illustrations of the imbecility of selfishness."

She turned again towards Denison.

"I often think," she said, "that selfishness is the village idiot of the mind's market-place. It goes about chuckling, but its poor silly tongue is hanging out all the time."

"I think the mind's market-place is as full of village idiots as life is full of maniacs," Denison replied, giving cynicism the rein. "I remember once going to hear the music in St. Paul's Cathedral, which is said to be so beautiful. I sat beside a maniac who joined in the anthem at the pitch of his voice."

"And what did you think of the music?"

"I could only hear the maniac."

"Ah!" she said, her dark eyes sparkling, "that's just it. When one goes to a cathedral one must choose one's seat carefully. To sit down beside a maniac is——" She paused.

"Yes," he said, with a smile.

"You allow me? Well, then, maniacal."

"I don't know anything about village idiots," cried the boy, with restless impatience, "but I know I mean to enjoy myself out here."

He again darted at Denison the strange claiming look that seemed, half-defiantly, to ask for sympathy.

"I suppose we most of us mean to do that," said Denison. "How are you going to set about it?"

"I have set about it," young Aintree said, with a laugh that caused a member of the travelling spinsterhood, who sat immediately opposite to him, to express by a sudden look of angry purity her subtle sense of outrage. "I have set about it. The grass shan't grow under my feet."

"My dear boy, it can't out here—unless you irrigate the soil," said his mother, easily creating a diversion.

And then, during the rest of dinner, they talked, in a more correct and hotel spirit, of the natural features of the country in which they were.

When the rustle that always attends the rising up from *table d'hôte* stirred in the great room, Denison found Guy Aintree immediately at his side.

"Are you coming out on the veranda to smoke?" the boy said.

Denison assented, and turning to Enid, asked if she were going to the public drawing-room. She went away with Mrs. Aintree, who said to Guy carelessly:

"Put on your coat, Guy."

"All right, mater," he answered, going to fetch it.

He came out on to the veranda a moment later, hastily buttoning it with an air of disgust. Denison was already ensconced in a rocking-chair with a lighted cigar between his lips. Aintree threw himself down at his side.

"All this wrapping up is such an infernal nuisance," he exclaimed, through an angry breath. "Getting into this beastly long thing is like getting into one's coffin. They'll make a regular Molly of me between them."

"The wind is cold this evening," Denison said, looking up at the amazing brilliance of the stars. "Out here it is summer by day and winter by night."

"Cairo's the place at night," Aintree said, and again he laughed in the peculiar manner that had so outraged the spinster at the dinner-table. "You have just come from there, haven't you?"

He lighted a cigarette.

"Yes," answered Denison.

"Well, then—you know what I mean. Eh?"

Denison began to feel bored. He feared that they were drifting toward the eternal after-dinner subjects, to the discussion of which male humanity has dedicated itself since dinners were first invented. In this wonderful Eastern night of stars it seemed inappropriate to talk as one talks in a London music-hall when surveying one of those glittering ballets that so elevate the mind and uplift the heart.

He answered, rather dryly :

"I have only been about Cairo by day, as yet."

The boy glanced at him, and nodded his head sagely.

"Oh! I forgot, you're married. Beg pardon."

"Marriage locks no doors for me," said Denison, rather languidly.

Aintree burst into a fit of coughing. When he recovered from it, he exclaimed, with his wildest air :

"I'll wrench the locks off every door I can, before I—before I am hung up."

"You mean before you marry?"

"If you like——" he hesitated; then he added in a hard, bitter voice: "No, I don't mean that."

There are other ways of getting hung up besides being married."

"Yes."

"Look here," the boy burst out. "I daresay you'll think me a queer fish, but I'm sick of keeping everything to myself; and anyhow, I don't much care what anyone thinks of me now. I've had nobody to talk to lately but the mater, and you can understand things, I'm sure. I shall be hung up, hung up to dry, and rot, before long. They pretend I shan't, but I know better. Look here, I'm only twenty. I haven't had a chance of very much fun yet—man's fun, I mean—and now I'm to be killed off out of the way. What would you do if you were me?"

Denison had half turned in his rocking-chair, and taken the cigar from between his lips. He began to be more interested.

"What would you do?" the boy repeated, leaning forward and gazing at his companion with hungry dark eyes.

Denison did not answer for the moment. He was not silent because he was seeking for conventional words, such as elderly men who have been foolish and are glad of it, think it their duty to address to young men who are going to be foolish and are glad of it. He was merely absorbed in

contemplation of a new phase of life. The philosopher in him was putting the microscope to his eye, preparatory to observing the insects struggling in the world of a water-drop. At last he said :

“Should I wrench the locks off as many doors as possible ? You mean that ?”

“Ah !”

The word came in a long-drawn breath.

Denison returned to his cigar.

“It is difficult to say,” he went on. “The word ‘pleasure’ means such very different things to different people. But I suppose we all of us, at some time in our lives, want to see what the thing called ‘life’ is.”

“Rather,” said Aintree, and there was a desperation of determination in his voice ; “and I will see it. Damn it !—I will.”

There was almost a sob sounding through the last words. He struck his hand down sharply on a bell that stood on a little table by him. A waiter glided up.

“Bring me a brandy-and-soda. A stiff one, d’you hear ?”

The man hurried off to get it.

“I don’t care what the doctors say about my wearing myself out, or anything else. I’ve got a certain time to do things in, and I’ll cram them all

up together. Did you know I was going to ride in the races? Of course you didn't; what a fool I am!"

The waiter put the brandy-and-soda down beside him. He took a long pull at it. Then he laughed again.

"I'm a lightweight now," he said, looking down over his own emaciation with a sort of dreadful appraising glance. "I ought to win. Don't you think so?"

Denison roused himself from his abstraction of hard contemplation.

"You ought to stand a good chance."

He considered whether he should, for once, be utterly conventional, quite untrue to himself, whether he should return this boy's strange confidence with a sober and platitudinous eloquence of warning and rebuke. But he could not bring himself to say the usual thing. He scarcely ever could. Instead he added:

"Then you have been to Cairo at night?"

"Yes. It's worse than London. You ought to go."

"I don't know that I care for anything merely because it is supposed to be evil," said Denison. "Several virtues are quite interesting."

"What's the good of virtue?" Aintree an-

swered, almost savagely. "I suppose the mater thinks I ought to be running after it, but she scarcely ever says so. She's not a bit like most mothers."

The words were spoken as if in a sort of reluctant praise.

"She can understand a fellow," he went on. "Women can't, as a rule. They wonder too much what they're looking like to care what you're feeling like. At least, girls do—English girls, and French."

The frown on his young face deepened, till it was a scowl, and abruptly he became silent and moody.

Denison did not disturb his silence.

He liked it too much for that. He could hear now, in the stillness, the gallop of this human mind, speeding, like Mephistopheles and Faust upon their black horses, towards the abyss. Under the stars he could hear the thud of the hoofs, the cries of the rider urging on the steed, the dull sound of the whip plied on the smoking flanks.

And the stars were so quiet, watching all.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. DENISON and her husband occupied adjoining bedrooms. Denison had engaged them, and Mrs. Denison had said nothing, asked for no explanation. A reserve of uneasiness, that did not yet amount to fear, had kept her silent.

That night, after leaving the veranda at about twelve, Denison went to bid her good-night. He came in softly, but Enid was still awake.

"You have finished smoking?" she said, as he bent down to kiss her.

"Yes, dear. Good-night."

"Good-night, dear Harry," she answered rather wistfully. "You are sure you feel quite well?"

"Perfectly. Just as the genial tourist should—all breezy heartiness and contentment. Sleep well."

He turned out the light and left the room. Then, going to his own room, he quickly began to take off his evening suit, and to draw on a gray Norfolk jacket and trousers. He put on

boots, took a stick, and came very softly to his door.

"There is no reason why she should know," he said to himself as he opened it with caution.

He shut the door quickly and walked gently down the corridor, past pairs of boots and shoes resting demurely on the mats. The hotel was asleep. People go to bed early in Egypt. A drowsy Arab in the hall let him out, and he stood in the empty veranda in the dim moonlight. The great rude outline of the Pyramid towered in front of him, black and enormous. The acacia-trees shivered in the wind, which was cold and almost wintry, but exquisitely pure and clean. In the mud village, that stands back on the green plain at the desert foot, the pariah dogs were howling drearily and persistently. Nobody was stirring. The greedy Bedouins in their white and blue robes, the snarling camels, that look as if they were fashioned in some leather-like material with a rough map on it, the bedizened donkeys in their finery of beads and tassels, the twisted, impish beggars—all doubtless rested, recuperating for the morrow's orgie of gain. Long ago the Mena coach had rolled back with its load to Cairo. Long ago the Victorias and the landaus, filled with amazed and ecstatic travellers, had departed in peace and dust. There was a

holy silence that glorified things, and seemed to bring back again the lost, antique years.

Denison turned up the collar of the Norfolk jacket, and stepped out into the white road.

He was strangely moved, and could not completely analyze the feelings that swept over his mind and heart, as the desert wind swept over his body, and kissed his hands and his face. There was an exultation within him, a sense of escape. He thought of his wife sleeping between the transparent white walls of the mosquito net, and he felt like a prisoner at large. As he went through the night up the road, along the base of the Great Pyramid out on to the rolling uplands of the sand, he was communing with himself.

“How mad Enid would think me if she knew! How mad everyone would think me! I suppose I am really absurd in allowing my imagination to drive me, as other men and women allow their vices to drive them. If I were creeping out now to commit a murder, or to keep an assignation with a woman, all the world would be able at least to guess at my feelings. But to keep an assignation with a stone! Lunacy in that—rank lunacy! Lunacy always in a riotous imagination that spends itself in acts rather than in written words!”

He stood still on the sand and listened. There is a wonderful live silence in the desert at night. The vague immensity that seems to the mind the counterpart of eternity becomes embodied under the strange stars, and presses softly round the Bedouin tents, the wandering caravan that tracks amid the billowing dust, the solitary human who, like Denison, gives himself to it even for a moment. The desert silence is the most wonderful of all sounds.

He stood and listened, and presently, from the village in the green plain, the howl of the pariah dogs came to him again. He started. He felt as if they knew his secret and howled against him. Then he went on softly in the sand.

“What a masquerade my life is, and has been always! I am for ever drenching the fire, and it is for ever bursting out again. My imagination is my vice, and I hide it so cautiously; yet it creeps through everything I feel, and colours all my sensations. A hungry love of mystery in a man of the world, a ravenous desire to be drawn and held at bay at one and the same time, by man, woman, anything—how dare one show it? One might as well pretend to culture and devour Mrs. Radcliffe’s novels in one’s club reading-room. And so one becomes a cynic, cavilling at everything because one thing must always be repressed. The cursed

world in which nobody dare go his own way quite calmly, quite fearlessly, and with no punishment coming upon him! Now I am my real self, and I am afraid because the dogs bark down there in the village. And if she knew, Enid would prate about sunstroke, and pay two guineas to a specialist for my sake. An impassive being, all power, all serene severity, terribly detached, yet near, with a watchfulness that never wearies, and a sleeplessness that never droops to slumber! Men come to see it from the ends of the world, stay five minutes staring, think it strange, exclaim at the cleverness of the men who made it, and go back to the ends of the world cheerfully satisfied. I cannot do that. Yesterday, as I stood there with Enid, I asked myself, 'Did men make it?' And my soul answered, 'No!' A mad answer, but something in me said it all the same. And so I am here! (One would think those dogs knew there was something moving in the night near them.) I have spent so many hours with living mysteries that I have at last understood, why should I not spend one alone with a dead mystery that I can never understand, with a soul of stone that I can never fathom? To look upon that great spirit of the sand and the old years take me away to where I want to be."

His pulses were quickening as he drew near to

the deep hollow in which the Sphinx reposes. In his eyes there was a flame that would have alarmed a well-bred Londoner.

“That is the terror of all art,” he thought—“of all art that appeals to us vitally. It catches us by the hand and translates us, but to some heaven so vague, so chaotic, that our eyes are filled with tears because we are there, although we would be there—or beyond—always. At private views I have stood before a Burne-Jones picture, in a frock-coat and a hat from Scott’s, and been snatched away until my throat was full of sobs, yet I felt that I was nowhere, had been nowhere. And so it is with those awful, indefinite regions that music creates for one, and peoples with beings whose faintest shadows one can scarcely see. As one listens, the horizons melt away, the perspective enlarges, there seems to be a flood of light, illuminating—nothing. It is as if windows were thrown open to a glad great land. One knows that it is there. One flies to the windows. One leans out, and there is nothing. Only, perhaps, a voice as of a wind below, a murmur as of reapers gathering in magical harvests, a stir as of the wings of passing birds, an up-borne scent as from hidden flowers, nestling in some stream-haunted hollow far away. That is why the eyes of people fill with tears when they gaze upon, or listen

to, what is perfectly beautiful or wonderful, and what is not sad. There is always the exquisite sense of an exquisite disappointment upon the heart. I felt it yesterday, and I must feel it again and alone."

He had reached the edge of the sandy cup now, and the huge couchant figure about which he had laughed in the carriage only yesterday met his eyes once more. The clear moonlight bathed it magically. The infinity of the desert solitudes brooded around it. And it kept its watch with the ineffable calm patience that has never tired through so many thousands of years. In the pure night, under the penetrating stars, it stared, silently, across the sands into the sleepy spaces of the shadowy night world. Denison stood before it alone.

But he felt that he was with a living presence, with a great enigma that he could never understand, never draw near to.

In this night hour he could be himself, could give a rein to the strange impulse that so often stirred him, and that he so often and so rigorously repressed.

His life was, and had always been, a starved life. He was afraid of himself, afraid to give the rein to the horses that might gallop to the abyss. Even that dark boy in the hotel was more courageous than he.

"If I could only find a riddle that I could never guess," he had said, sitting in his library in Cadogan Square, and then he had turned the photographs of the riddles he had guessed with their faces to the wall. And that action, fanciful, even childish, had nevertheless symbolized his life in a sense.

He ran through things with a terrible swiftness, drew people out with a surprising facility, knew them, and tired, despite himself. His imagination was so luxuriant as to be a curse to him, and his keen vision, his inevitable detachment from everyone, including himself, posed him in the weary seat of the scornful, sneering at the world and at his own impulses. He possessed in an eminent degree the foolish modern fear of all strong feeling, and so he struggled perpetually against his own nature. He turned his imagination, like the photographs, with its face to the wall. He had done with it. He knew it. No more of it. He treated it as a saint might treat the secret vice that whispers to him, "Come; come and be a sinner!" When it rose and shook him, struggled in his heart, shone in his eyes in tears that others could not have understood, impelled him to behave unlike the puppets whose antics he analyzed, he beat it down, he refused it harbourage.

But then, sometimes, as the vice drives the saint from the hermitage in the rocks to the streets of the city, his imagination ran riot, and swept him unresisting with it, through fantasies that men might have called madnesses.

Once, in a house where he was staying, he had spent a whole night in the darkness, with a picture that had laid a spell upon him. Only to be near to it, only to know that it was there, had been enough to wake in him a joy that he himself could not understand. At dawn he had stolen softly up the stairs like a guilty thing, and fallen upon his bed, weary with emotion.

Once he had crushed a violin in his arms, as one might crush a woman, driven by an over-mastering desire to tear forth the mysterious voice that breathed out all the essence of all the divinest joys and sorrows of the wayward world.

And then he asked himself, "Am I mad?" and, with a shudder, he drew on cynicism, as a man draws on a domino, and danced decorously at the masquerade of life.

To-night the domino was thrown aside, the mask had fallen to the floor. Furtively he had stolen out to be himself where no one could see and wonder.

The Sphinx lays a spell upon all. It is too strange to leave no impression upon anybody. But

to Denison it had seemed, as he stood before it, first, in the burning afternoon and near to the clamouring tourists, the Something he had waited for, wanted, all his life. The immensity of its gaze, the terrible, unrelenting passivity of its attitude, drew him as the hidden vice draws the holy man till he falls.

Had his wife refused to stay at the Mena House, Denison would have forced her to come there.

This watching mystery governed him.

He knew that it was a madness. He did not care. Life is so full of madresses that the world, strange officiating priest, lifts on high and solemnly consecrates.

Now he stood in the moonlight, gazing at the blurred face, till a definite life seemed to flicker into its eyes.

He felt that there was a soul behind them and had been, unguessed by men, through all these ages, a masterful, unreadable soul, profoundly thoughtful, profoundly grave, sternly elevated—a soul that he wanted to worship.

He watched the marred, majestic face, and wove wild legends round about it as the night wore on. He even ceased to stand outside, like a detective, and observe his own mind's procedure. He immersed himself in the tremendous dignity that

seemed to sweep the ages together and put them aside as nothing.

And as he gazed, till the moonlight faded, and the gray-tressed dawn slipped over the sands, a fantastic passion woke in his heart.

He trembled while he acknowledged it, as the madman may tremble when the first faint delusion slides into his brain and, half aware of its monstrous absurdity, he has yet no strength to drive it out.

With the sun, Denison was at the door of the hotel.

The pariah dogs still howled from the village that was set in the green land beyond the acacia-trees.

They seemed to utter his secret to the waking world.

CHAPTER VI.

WITHIN the next few days a certain intimacy sprang up between Denison and the Aintrees—an intimacy from which Enid seemed deliberately to exclude herself. The little wife, having resolved that Mrs. Aintree was the reason that had drawn her husband to Mena House, was inclined to hold rather aloof from her, not precisely prompted by jealousy. At least, Enid would not admit such a thing, even to herself. In her own mind she thought that Mrs. Aintree did not suit her. She had no leanings towards Bohemia. When in London she liked to go into what is called smart society, the sort of society that still continues to regard the talent that manifests itself in brilliant and unceasing work as something to be loftily patronized, or lightly wondered at. Enid really believed that you must be dirty before you could have genius. Her mother had brought her up in this faith, and, amid the scepticism of a cynical age, she clung to it devoutly. Mrs. Aintree, on the contrary, was gifted

with an intellect that marched at the double, and to a music that continually varied. It kept in step with the rapid footfalls of the many movements of a flying century, rushing, as it seemed, with a passionate resolution upon its death. Not born in Bohemia, Mrs. Aintree had always looked upon it as a land created for her to make holiday in, much as English Alpine climbers look upon Switzerland. When she was tired of the society of Northamptonshire squires, of hunting talk, and what she called mangel-wurzel jokes, she packed her boxes, took her ticket, and was soon revelling in the intellectual scenery that she loved, looking upon the mountains of effort, listening to the tinkling sheep-bells of the poets, breathing the exquisite atmosphere of enterprise and of assertion that is a tonic to the souls of the ardent.

Enid instinctively felt that she and Mrs. Aintree would not be quite congenial companions. Their outlook was different. One liked a narrow path to walk in, bordered by discreet rows of well-kept garden flowers, and box hedges cut into fashionable shapes. The other desired breadth, space, rolling downs, a tangled wilderness of struggling plants, all forcing themselves upwards to sun and air. Enid was passionately orthodox, Mrs. Aintree was passionately unorthodox, but from temperament, not at

all because she thought it daring to be so. The pioneer who clears a path through the forest to get at a tiger's lair, merely in order to wear the tiger's skin at an evening party, and be written about in the papers, was an abomination to her. She moved because there was a divine restlessness within her, not because she saw her neighbours trotting along and was afraid of being left behind. And her restlessness shook hands with the restlessness of Denison.

He himself was surprised to find that he liked his grip.

He was in a strange mood of excitement which he had to continually repress. At night he might indulge it, but when the sun rose over the sands the gray hood must be drawn over it, the gray mantle wrapped round it. The cradle in which his monstrous passion lay must be rocked softly, and a lullaby invented to send it for the time to sleep. Mrs. Aintree and her son were the lullaby that Denison sang by day near the cradle of his passion. He plunged himself into their lives with a curious desperation. Enid noticed it with an increasing uneasiness.

She now began to regret that little scene at Ismailia on the banks of the bitter lake. She had desired to be understood. She had wished her hus-

band to give up studying her, and had fancied that when he ceased from dissection he would make over the spare time thus gained to love. But he seemed now farther from her than ever before. He no longer watched her. If she prayed, he had no sort of curiosity as to the nature of the silent petitions she put up. And with the death of his curiosity had there not come another death?

Enid shuddered and thrust the question away from her mind. She would not think it. But day by day she saw her husband exploring the minds of Mrs. Aintree and her son—roused to an interest which she could no longer awaken in him. She began to hate the Mena House, but at first she did not say so. If she were sitting amid ruins she could not feel quite alone so long as she had dignity for a companion. Enid and dignity were much together at this time.

The intimacy between Mrs. Aintree and Denison had been established with some abruptness one morning when they were lounging on the veranda. Enid was indoors writing a letter to her mother. She wrote letters to her mother perpetually. They were all about nothing, but her mother happened to be the sort of woman who likes that sort of letter. She replied from Grosvenor Square in the same strain, which comforted Enid greatly. Nothingness,

written at length, is wonderfully helpful to many people. It sustains them amid the excursions and alarms of a too definite world. They turn to it in their troubles as paupers turn to tea, and find its warm weakness infinitely solacing.

Most of the people who were staying at Mena House had driven into Cairo or gone down to the golflinks. Guy Aintree was among the former. His mother and Denison had the verandah almost to themselves. Denison had come out and found Mrs. Aintree lounging in a low chair with a book in her lap. She was not reading. He sat down by her.

"I thought you were going into Cairo with your boy," he said.

She smiled rather thoughtfully.

"No. I made up my mind not to be maternal to-day. I checked the natural impulse." She stopped; then added, "Guy was glad, I think."

"Had he been anticipating a maternal mood?"

"I don't know. Probably not. When he expects the usual sort of thing from me he seldom gets it."

"He is an enviable son. Most boys expect it and get it from most mothers."

"Yes. I often think that the tragedies of life, the tragedies of feeling in families, for instance, are

brought about by the prevalence of the usual sort of thing in life. There is a traditional attitude of parents towards their children, and children towards their parents, and traditional attitudes are generally ugly and ungraceful. Few mothers know their sons, and the knowledge that they do not is their cross. But it is their own fault for being what is called motherly. We tell our secrets only to those who, we feel, have secrets of their own."

"Do you mean that the guilty never confide in the innocent?"

"Rather that the knowing never confide in the ignorant. The ignorant cannot understand, and have a lust for being shocked. The mother who can be shocked will be deceived by her boys."

"You are certainly what Clapham would call original," Denison said, as he struck a match and lit a cigar.

"Clapham is a gigantic place," she answered; "I could not name its boundaries."

"I don't know that anyone could. I have no children, but if I had I could never be paternal. To be properly paternal you must have a double chin, sit in a library, send for your children and have scenes with them—a most boring profession."

"Yes, and one that would bring in a large income of heartache. But you exaggerate amusingly.

Keep the double chin if you like, but leave out the scenes. And yet it is that double chin of the mind that scares youth. My boy has no father. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why he treats me like a man."

"If he had no mother, could he treat his father like a woman?"

Mrs. Aintree put up her parasol. The sun was getting very hot. She shifted her chair a little way back into the shadow. Then she said:

"I don't quite know why it is, but though a woman can be both female and male in mind, a man must be either one or the other. He never combines the two."

"Men are fantastically rigid. They think it manly."

"There is something manly in rigidity, in the stone character. You may chip it, you cannot pierce it. But that may be the reason why a man can seldom be father and mother. I am often considered to be no parent at all to my boy. In Northamptonshire we always hunt together and shoot together. I have led him over many a stiff line of country. And in return he allows me to follow him after all his foxes—all."

Denison glanced at her curiously.

"But you are not in Cairo to-day," he said.

"No."

"And you said just now, 'Guy is glad, I think.'"

"I said he allows me to follow him. I do not wish to ride by his side and be in at the death. There are family relations that create impossibilities. One cannot fight with them. One can only recognise as few as possible."

"I see."

"Of course I know," she added rather impetuously, "that Guy goes into Cairo too often."

"Do you tell him so?"

"As seldom as possible. When he comes back he describes to me all he has done."

"You are sure?"

"I am sure."

Denison did not speak for a moment. He was distinctly interested, and found Mrs. Aintree, as he had anticipated, a very unusual woman. Then he said:

"If so, I can hardly understand in what sort of way you receive his confidence."

"I receive it as a comrade."

"But comrades vary in character, do they not?"

"I receive it as a human being who does not shrink from anything that is human, even when I find it in my own son. Mr. Denison, I suppose I am talking to you rather strangely, but why should

I not? Guy has taken an abrupt boyish fancy to you, and I can see that you understand how it is with him. Poor boy! People who talk nonsense would say that he is not himself now, and he is not what he was. But how can it be expected that he should be? Life has suddenly changed for him, and he has changed with it."

"He has changed then?"

"A year ago he was just a natural boy, apparently strong and healthy—strong enough and healthy enough to think little of vice. The absolutely sound body is rather inclined to despise the vicious. It sees their innate weakness. The really wicked are always gone at the knees, depend upon it."

Denison only smiled slightly. She continued, leaning forward a little under her white parasol, her great eyes sparkling with eagerness beneath their thick eyebrows:

"He disregarded vice, guided much more in ways of virtue by sanity of body than by religious principle."

"I see."

"But—his father died of consumption. Guy caught a chill out hunting. The disease of his father manifested itself immediately in him. In the summer he got much better, but the autumn taught us both that there was a weird we had to dree. The

learning of that lesson has twisted the boy's whole nature. It has waked up in him the scoundrel that sleeps in almost every man. You have seen that. The whole hotel knows it to some extent, but the whole hotel does not understand the tragedy of my boy's soul."

The tears started suddenly into her eyes, and she did not look in the least ashamed of them or anxious to hide them.

"Some of the people here pity me," she continued, "and some condemn me. They pity me for being, as they think, the victim of an openly dissipated son. Or they condemn me for acquiescing, as they think, in what they call his sins against the decalogue. But which of them pities Guy? Which of them imagines that I am my son's confidante? I suppose almost every mother in England would look upon me as a sort of monster."

"The mothers of England have very strange ways of looking at life," said Denison.

"I cannot see things as they do. I only know that my boy feels suddenly an awful loneliness of soul, an awful sense of being dragged away from all people and things. And my motherhood makes me determined to be close to him at any cost. If he will sin, I tell you that I would rather sin with him than allow him to feel that—that I was, like so many

mothers, a saint, standing far away on the steps of an altar, praying for him perhaps, loving him and pitying him, but not with him. If we cannot die with the ones we love, at least we can go with them right up to death. The loneliness of death itself is little, I think; it is the loneliness of the life just before it that is so appalling. My son shall not be lonely."

There was a note of strong, almost unwomanly, determination in her voice. She looked Denison full in the face, then she added:

"Try to understand him. He wishes you to do so. It would be a good action."

"I think I do understand him," Denison said. "He is attempting to pour all the wine of life into one tiny cup. What a pity he cannot learn the lesson I have learnt, that the ordinary wine of life, the wine all men drink, is not worth even sipping."

"Isn't it?" she said.

The question a little surprised Denison.

"You——" he hesitated.

"As a woman I have never drunk it. I have never had the wish to drink it," she said, immediately grasping all he would have said, and showing neither surprise nor angry dignity. "It has generally seemed to me that men are only anxious to

drink the dregs, but I supposed that the dregs must be peculiarly delicious."

"It has been a legend to humanity that they are so, and, like most legends, it is false."

"Guy does not know that, and if I tried to teach it to him he would cease to regard me as his comrade, and begin to regard me as his mother. But you—you might try."

"To make him believe in early youth what so few of us can even believe in old age? It would be no good."

"It might be. Because I choose to be the confidante of all his sinful and impure secrets, do not suppose that I am blind to the tragedy of this new way of life of his. I know him absolutely, and I know that if I began to preach—however carefully I might do it—in his present condition he would become immediately more hard, more resolute in his course than ever. I should not shut sin out of his life; I should only shut myself out. And that I will never do—never! But you have lived, and—got tired of it?"

"Horribly tired," said Denison.

"I wish you would show to him all your fatigue," she said. "I cannot, because I have none. I love life intensely—all the life, at least, that is really alive."

"And I hate it intensely, all the life that you would call really alive."

"What do you mean? I mean my fellow-creatures."

"Of course—people."

"Yes."

"As a rule I hate them."

"But they are so wonderfully various."

"I find them so amazingly similar."

"Perhaps just on the surface. They have little tricks and so on——"

"It is when you dive below the surface that you come to the real root—monotony, the mental tricks that everlastingly repeat themselves. Words are supposed to express minds, aren't they? Well, everybody says the same words over and over again. Men and women always talk about the weather."

Mrs. Aintree's expression and attitude eloquently told him that she was arming herself for the combat, but suddenly Enid appeared through the door. She had finished writing about nothing at all to Grosvenor Square, and had even dropped her letter into the box. She now came forward, looking deliciously pretty and delicately piteous.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Aintree," she said.

“What a lovely day, isn’t it? The weather seems to be always fine in Egypt.”

Denison felt that his wife had given him the victory.

CHAPTER VII.

THIS conversation between Mrs. Aintree and Denison on the veranda eventually led to various developments; but just at first it merely induced Denison to resume once more the slight interest in humanity which he had fancied entirely dead in him. Mrs. Aintree and her son began to partially engross his mind during the day. To some natures there is something very seizing in a direct appeal. Mrs. Aintree had treated Denison with a quite unexampled frankness, and her frankness certainly woke him out of the cynicism that was so apt to put people and their affairs aside with a smile or a sneer. He resolved to try to penetrate a little way into Guy's life. The boy had from the first taken an odd fancy to him—a fancy quite unaccountable, and springing, doubtless, partly from the ill-health that took, subtly, more hold on him from day to day. This fancy made Denison's task rather an easy one.

In the clear, starlit evenings, when the crowd of

tourists had melted away, when the Great Pyramid had a silence of the stars round its summit, a silence of the sands round its base, they often sat smoking together, the boy closely wrapped up, his throat muffled in silk handkerchiefs.

One evening Mrs. Aintree and Enid joined them on the veranda. The weather was exceptionally warm, and almost everyone was out, discussing expeditions, the charges of the donkey-boys, the temples, the tombs, and the grand tour of the Nile. The Denisons and the Aintrees were gathered in their rocking-chairs round a small table on which stood a tray with four tiny cups of thick coffee. Guy Aintree was looking singularly pale and haggard, and his cough was troublesome.

"I wish we could go out shooting jackals," he said presently to his mother. "In a week it will be bright moonlight. Saïd told me there were a lot about the desert towards Sakkara."

"Perhaps we will," she answered gaily. "What do you say, Mr. Denison?"

"I am a bad shot," he replied, rather dryly. "But I suppose here if you miss your jackal you hit your Pyramid. It would be a new sensation to bring down a Pyramid at, say, twenty paces."

"Mind you don't pepper the Sphinx by mis-

take," cried Aintree. "It's disfigured enough already."

A slight shade that could scarcely be observed crossed Denison's face. He answered with some constraint and a sort of singular effort:

"I think its blurred appearance becomes it. I fancy that the monuments we often speak of with regret as splendid ruins owe half their artistic value to the decay that has overtaken them."

"I dare say it is so, Harry," said Mrs. Denison, sipping her coffee with an air of childlike romance. "Still, if I were the Sphinx, I should prefer Time to leave my poor nose alone."

Directly she had said the words, she noticed that the unwonted irritation she had observed in her husband's manner on the first day of their visit to the Pyramids was stirring in him again. He showed it by various slight signs, by the way in which he fidgeted with his coffee-cup, by an obviously checked desire to make some too definite rejoinder to her innocent remark. He wore somewhat the air of a man who would like to defend an absent person from an attack and is held back only by prudential motives. Enid had not the intuition or the intelligence to put so subtle an interpretation upon his demeanour. Her attention was for the moment attracted, but that fact could not render her acute.

She only looked rather piteously at her husband, and began once more to dwell vaguely on sunstroke. It seemed so appropriate in Egypt, she thought, terrible though it would be.

"The Arabs have no sort of reverence for their marvellous monuments," Mrs. Aintree said. "They would think nothing of playing backgammon in a temple, or pitching stones at the Sphinx."

Enid stared more apprehensively at her husband.

"They ought to be taught to behave properly," he said, pulling hard at his cigar.

"Who is to teach them?" Mrs. Aintree asked. "The English tourist who scratches the inscription 'Jones' on every stone that lies in his way? I am afraid the task would be a hopeless one."

"Nevertheless, I attempted it the other day," Denison said. "I knocked a Vandal down, and so far I was meritorious, but when he got up I gave him five piastres. He had thrown a stone at the Sphinx."

Mrs. Aintree smiled.

"You have done an unfortunate thing," she said lightly. "You have created a precedent. Every Bedouin that lives will pelt the Sphinx now in hopes of piastres. There will be nothing left of it by the end of the season."

"It has lived so long that it will die hard—like

a government," Denison answered, smiling with concurrence in her chaff.

Enid smiled too, cheerfully, and dismissed all thoughts of sunstroke from her mind. To-night she was feeling rather happier than usual. Harry had driven her into Cairo during the afternoon, and had escorted her round the bazaars, seeming willing to linger amid their marvels just as long as she pleased. He had bought a number of pretty things. Indeed, at that moment she was wearing an exquisitely embroidered Zouave that he had given to her. It fitted her slight figure beautifully, and this fact gave her renewed confidence in his affection—why, she did not know. Perhaps it was because she felt serenely that Mrs. Aintree could never have got into it. Enid was seldom logical in her mental processes, and, moreover, the conclusions to which she leapt were quite as often wrong as right. Frequent discovery of this fact, however, did not check her ill-advised agility, and she still felt it to be her duty, as a pure-minded and true woman, to trust implicitly in what she called her intuitions. To-night, then, her intuitions, and the fact that she felt she was looking her best, led her to a pleasant confidence in the abiding strength of her husband's affection. She glanced at Mrs. Aintree and told herself that she had been absurd to

believe that Harry could be really interested in a woman with a grown-up son. Many women fancy that it is impossible to possess a child six feet high and charm. Guy Aintree stood six feet in his boots. His measurements reassured Enid, and, sitting beside her husband, she softly stole her hand into his under the protecting coffee table.

Denison was bored by the action. The course the conversation had taken since dinner had greatly irritated him, and the fact that it had been able to irritate him alarmed him. He moved usually in a calm that had its root in contempt, and had learnt to be almost entirely self-centred. He generally disagreed with the remarks of those around him, heard their statements with amusement, and their deductions with derision; but he seldom felt inclined to preach his own gospel, and, even when he did, was easily able to stifle the inclination. His control over himself was so perfect that he could rely upon it implicitly. Since he had come to Mena House, however, he knew that there were moments in which he had great difficulty in restraining himself from words and actions which would certainly cause surprise and perhaps alarm to those about him. The links of the chain armour that concealed his mind were slightly loosened. He could only accomplish by thinking that which he

was usually able to accomplish instinctively. Even Enid, who boasted that she understood him, had twice been moved to alarm by his momentary exhibition of his real self—once on the day of their arrival at the Pyramids, and once to-night. To his irritated fancy the touch of her soft hand was an attempt to soothe him, made in all good faith, as one soothes a cat by stroking its head, or a baby by the utterance of babbling imbecilities. He felt that she expected him to promptly purr or coo. He would have liked to scratch or scream. But he merely pressed her hand gently, and sipped his coffee.

Guy Aintree's project of jackal-shooting was entirely distasteful to him. The days he gave to the world, not willingly, but of necessity, and with the resignation induced by long custom. But the nights had been his own hitherto. When he had kissed Enid and drawn the white veil of the mosquito net round her bed, when the hotel was quiet and the stars watched over a sleeping world, he kept what he had come to look upon fancifully as a tryst. That even one night should be taken from him seemed to him monstrous. During the day he occupied himself with the Aintrees, and found it possible to be distracted from himself and his own unquiet thoughts by the curious pathos and tragedy of

the relations of this mother and son. But at night the closing of bedroom doors shut them and all humanity out of his life, and he gave himself up to the world of imagination, of silence, of mystery. And now it was suggested calmly that even the night hours should be taken from him. He felt an acute resentment, and the knowledge that it was entirely unreasonable and absurd did not certainly lessen it. Mechanically, he continued to stroke the hand of Enid, however, and she sat happily serene, thinking alternately of her husband and her embroidered Zouave, delighted with the kindness of the one and the fit of the other. She was only observant by accident, and she very rarely had an accident.

Mrs. Aintree, on the other hand, was observant habitually and quite naturally. Nothing escaped her notice, and now, Denison, glancing towards her in the semi-twilight, found her eyes fixed upon him full of a deep consideration. She did not hastily withdraw them as he looked up, but she changed their expression. They became immediately alert and challenging, and she turned the conversation into another channel with the consummate ease of a really clever woman. But Denison felt that he had been watched, and by someone who could not be diverted, like Enid, by an unmeaning pressure of

the hand from analysis of his moods and the possible causes of them. A slight sense of fear overtook him for the moment. Then he pulled himself together, banished it with vigour, and became—so Enid thought rapturously—quite himself again.

But the evening was not to end in perfect amity. Enid and Mrs. Aintree went indoors at ten o'clock, and soon afterwards young Aintree also got up.

"I want to have a drink," he said, looking at Denison and drawing his brows together in a frown. "Come and have one."

Denison was one of those abnormal men who never swallow liquid when they don't want it, from a sense of politeness. He could not bring himself to see any close connection between breeding and brandy, and the sort of good fellowship that is baptized in unnecessary whisky and soda, brought up by hand on gin and bitters, fostered in the bar, and made perfect by a deliberate drunkenness, seemed to him unusually imbecile.

"No, thank you," he answered. "I am not thirsty."

He glanced up at the boy as he spoke, and noticed how haggard and sinister Guy looked. For the moment an unusual sense of pity smote him.

"Go to bed," he said; "you have been doing too much."

"Bed!" cried Aintree disdainfully, "at this time. What do you take me for? My dear fellow, I feel inclined to begin now. I shan't be ready for bed for another two hours at least. Come along."

He had assumed suddenly a violent vivacity, stretched his thin, pale lips in a smile, and stuck his hands deep into his pockets as he swung to and fro on his toes and heels.

"Go to bed," Denison repeated harshly.

Aintree ceased to smile, paused a moment as if on the point of saying something violent in reply, then turned round and made his way into the hotel.

Denison was left almost alone. There were only two or three other men dotted about smoking. He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. He wanted to feel thoroughly the largeness of the night after the pettiness of the day. He wanted to detach himself, to get away in thought from the tragic trivialities that had swarmed around him ever since he had got up that morning. Trivialities, he called them silently—Enid's unintelligent devotion to him, perpetual adoring misunderstanding of all he said and did, Mrs. Aintree's strange attitude towards her dying son, Guy Aintree's mute and lonely despair, shuddering like a beast in the far corner of a cage whose bars were gilded. Yet in the day-time these trivialities still had some power to interest him, and

even now, as he sat with closed eyes, he could not shut the white weary boy out from his mind. He mused on the young life that had armed itself in such a passionate antagonism against the edict that had gone forth—the edict of death. Aintree was beating himself uselessly, hopelessly against an unyielding enemy, that received the shock of his encounter with an indifference so total as to be devilish.

And then Denison, for the first time, perceived the similarity between the boy's position and his, the similarity and the strange dissimilarity. Aintree and he were both uselessly and silently fighting something. The one was fighting against death, the other against life. Could the positions be reversed, would a change of mind come inevitably with that other change?

If Denison were given death to dwell with, how would it affect him? He asked himself the question, and, with a cynical certainty, answered that he would welcome the companion whom Aintree strove to turn from with horror. And then his mind stole out in the night, up the white road, past the shadowy bulk of the Great Pyramid, beyond, across the irregular uplands of the sand. The trivialities fell away from him. A peace came to him.

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"Mr. Denison, where is Guy?" said Mrs. Aintree's voice at his side.

Denison started up. He had been sitting there abstracted for a long while. Midnight had struck.

Mrs. Aintree repeated her question. She had come out wrapped in a cloak and looking rather pale.

"Guy?" he said, collecting himself with an effort. "He left me soon after you went in. Probably he is in bed." He looked at his watch. "I had no idea it was so late," he said.

"No, he is not in his room. And to-night he is so ill that I resolved to sink the comrade in the mother, give him good advice and pack him off to rest. Where can he be?"

She spoke in a perfectly calm voice, but her eyes were full of excitement and restlessness.

"I will go and look for him," Denison said; "I think I can find him easily."

"He went to the bar, I suppose?" she said simply.

"Yes."

They passed in together. Her bedroom candle was burning in the hall; she took it up, and they walked through the long and dark passages in search of the boy. Presently they found him, lying huddled on the floor, his face turned to the

wall. Mrs. Aintree did not say a word ; her expression scarcely changed. Denison was watching it. She knew that. The condition of the boy was sufficiently obvious.

When Denison bent down and took hold of him, he muttered a word or two, apparently of angry protest. Denison easily lifted him up—he weighed little—and, with the assistance of Mrs. Aintree, got him upstairs to his room. To reach it they had to pass down the corridor in which the Denisons' bedrooms were. As they did so, Guy stumbled helplessly, and Mrs. Aintree said suddenly in a sharp voice :

“ Hold him up, please.”

“ It is all right,” Denison answered.

They walked on slowly, and Denison left the mother and son in the latter's room, and returned softly toward his own. Just as he was opening his door, he heard the voice of his wife calling to him, and he found that her door was slightly open. He went to her. She was sitting up in bed with a flushed face. Her eyes looked strained and staring, and fixed themselves on his with a hungry inquiry.

“ Harry,” she said, “ how late you are ! Why were you going to bed without coming in to see me ? ”

“ I thought I should disturb you,” he answered.

He stood beside her bed looking particularly cold and grave. The last episode of his long day had been especially distasteful to him, and he was not in a mood to speak to anybody. He longed for loneliness and silence, and his attitude seemed mutely to express an intense desire to be gone.

Something had spurred Enid's mind into unwonted activity, and she noticed this.

"Why are you in a hurry?" she asked, twisting the edge of the sheet uneasily between her little fingers.

Denison resigned himself, with a deliberateness that was not without a veiled impatience.

"I am in no hurry," he said, sitting down beside his wife. "Do you want to talk?"

Her dark eyes again searched his face rapidly, but for a moment she did not say anything. Then she lay down, turning towards him, and burying one flushed cheek in the pillow.

"I heard you just now," she said.

"Going to my room?"

"No, going into the next corridor with—with Mrs. Aintræe."

Denison shuddered with a keen repulsion. He guessed immediately what was coming to put an intolerable finish to a day that he told himself had

been specially intolerable. Enid was going to be monstrously like all other loving wives ; she was preparing to play the scene that ought to have been hissed off the stage of life as utterly obsolete how many decades ago !

He sat without making any reply, giving any explanation, frozen in a sudden ice of contemptuous reserve that seemed almost to deprive him of the power of speech.

Enid waited for him to speak ; finding he said nothing, she continued, with an increasing display of excitement :

“ Two hours ago Mrs. Aintree got up and left the drawing-room, telling me she was going to bed, and now I hear her with you when it is nearly half-past twelve, and you go to your room without bidding me good-night. I—I—— ”

She buried her face in the pillow and began to sob.

Denison suddenly sprang up. He was seized by a violent repulsion from his wife, from the Aintrees, from everybody. He yielded to it on the instant.

“ Good-night,” he muttered, hastily going out of the room.

In a moment he was in his own room. He locked the door and hurried to the window, throw-

ing it wide open to the stars and the silences of sky and desert.

He could have caught the soft wind in his arms, like a child, and fondled it. He could have knelt to the stars and worshipped them. He could have prayed to the silences and wished for no answer.

But soon the pressure of the walls of the room behind him—the imagined pressure—became unbearable. He went out into the night, driven by the strange passion that held him in its grip more tenaciously each hour that he lived.

CHAPTER VIII.

Two days afterwards Mrs. Denison said to her husband, in a surprise that verged on agitation :

“But I thought we were going up the Nile, Harry, by the *Prince Abbas* ?”

“When I was in Cairo, yesterday, I transferred our tickets,” he answered.

There was a flush of colour in his face that was not natural to him, but he spoke very quietly, and his manner was serene. Mrs. Denison said nothing for a moment, her expressive eyes were shadowy with tears, and her lips trembled piteously.

“What will Sir Everard and Lady Taylor think of us ?” she uttered at last. “They took their berths on purpose to be with us.”

“They will survive the disappointment, Enid. And they are very dull companions. Sir Everard wants me for his picquet, that is all.”

“But we have been here more than ten days already,” she protested with trembling obstinacy. “We have seen everything. And we never in-

tended to come here at all—it is throwing all our plans out.”

The flush on Denison’s face deepened, and he turned to look out of the window to hide the angry excitement in his eyes.

“I hate laying out a tour in England, and sticking to it,” he said. “Could any proceeding be more limited? Before you have seen the places you mean to visit, you arrange how long you will spend at each, and perhaps you omit altogether the very ones you would like the best.”

“But we have been here so long already,” Mrs. Denison reiterated, squeezing her hands together as if she meditated wringing them should the tragedy of the conversation deepen. “I have been inside the Pyramid among those awful little bats, and I have been carried up it, and I have seen the Temple, and the Arab go down the hundred feet of wall into the tomb, and the Sphinx till I am tired of it.”

Denison suddenly threw open the bedroom window and leaned out, making no answer.

His wife, after standing for a moment as if in hesitation, seemed to come to a portentous resolution. She tightened the clasp of her hands, straightened her little figure, and walked across to the window.

“Harry,” she said, “I must speak out. I must

say it. I think—I am sure I know why you are determined to stay on here.”

Her husband drew back into the room. The flush had died out of his face now and he was pale.

“What do you mean?” he asked, staring at her with a gaze that expressed dogged defiance. “What do you mean?”

Enid looked down steadily.

“I mean that while Mrs. Aintree is here you are happy,” she said in a low voice.

There was a silence. The defiance died out of Denison’s eyes, and a smile, that might almost have been a smile of relief, hovered on his lips.

“What a fool I am!” he thought. “For once I actually fancied that she was going to show some cleverness.”

Then he answered :

“Enid, like all women you jump to conclusions without much thought, and sometimes you jump to right ones. This time you are in error. I find Mrs. Aintree fairly amusing. She may be labelled ‘bright’ without deviating far from the truth. But I know so many bright women, and she is much like the rest. I have a certain fancy for her son. It is strange, but I think I really pity him, and I am not given to pitying either myself or others. To be

pitiful in a pitiless universe is to lie down on one's back like a dog, and expose one's self defenceless to a beating. But Mrs. Aintree and her son are nothing to me. I wish to stay on here because I find the air marvellously invigorating. The years are dropping from me. Many people spend months here."

He paused, but his wife said nothing. She stood with the air of one who listens without agreeing. There was a mute but rigid disbelief in her attitude and in her expression. Denison did not fail to observe it.

"You do not believe me?" he said.

"I am not quite a fool, Harry," she answered, "although sometimes lately you have thought me so. No; I do not believe you."

He laughed lightly without anger.

"To be so downright is a merit which I appreciate," he said. "You might give your sex a lesson. Nevertheless, you are wrong."

Suddenly Mrs. Denison burst into violent tears. She sat down in an armchair, and sobbed—terrible, long-drawn sobs, that convulsed her pretty, slight figure. She had made her little effort at dignified and acute composure, but it had been too much for her. The previous tension rendered the breakdown the more piteously complete. She was a sorry

spectacle of disordered jealousy as she sat there with the tears rolling over her soft cheeks.

Denison was by her side quietly in a moment, trying, rather coldly, to soothe her. This grief of hers, bitter though it obviously was, seemed so far away from him, almost as if he saw, in a dream, some woman weeping in another world.

"Enid, this is ridiculous," he said. "Jealousy is always undignified, but when it is founded on air it is preposterous. Don't cry. You have nothing to cry about. I am as much yours to-day as I ever was."

Still sobbing, and in a shattered manner, Mrs. Denison convulsively ejaculated one sentence:

"Then where were you the other night?"

Denison changed colour slightly. He had not been prepared for this.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "When?"

"After you left me on the night when I heard you talking to Mrs. Aintree in the corridor, and told you I had heard, I went to your room. I was very unhappy. I thought perhaps I had been unreasonable and unkind. I felt I could not sleep until I had spoken to you again. You were not in your room. I waited there till half-past one o'clock. You did not return. Then I lay down on

my bed, with the door open, listening. And, after a long while, I fell asleep."

She sobbed again.

Her husband looked at her in silence.

"Well?" came from her unevenly at last.

"I was out walking," Denison said, meeting her eyes steadily.

"Walking! In the middle of the night?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

After a moment of apparent hesitation, he answered:

"Quite."

Mrs. Denison put up her handkerchief to her eyes and dabbed them forlornly.

"It is very odd," she said.

"I suppose I have the right to enjoy the moonlight and the stillness if I wish," her husband went on, with a definite calm that seemed rather strained.

"Oh, yes."

He paused, as if expecting some more explicit comment on his explanation, but nothing came. The sobs were subsiding. That was all. He turned to go, but just as he reached the door Mrs. Denison suddenly put down her soaked handkerchief and said in a more even voice, and with a less seized demeanour:

"I have noticed the change in you, Harry, though I have said nothing. Since we have been here you are an altered man. You have something perpetually on your mind that keeps you abstracted. Generally you are so cool and observant; now, instead of watching other people, you are often thinking that other people are watching you. I don't know why, but it is so. You are restless. How can I help seeing it? How can I help being wretched about it?"

A slightly anxious expression had come into Denison's eyes while she spoke. He was very unpleasantly surprised. The gates of a fool's paradise suddenly shut upon him. He felt for the moment like a man who has got his back against a wall and his face to an enemy. Then he said, with a rather elaborate assumption of airy ridicule:

"The fanciful woman is an eternal wonder, even to those who know her best. I can only pray that your imagination may become less vivid, Enid. Otherwise, like Pilate's wife, I am likely to 'suffer many things' in the future because of you."

He turned away, on the last word, and left the room, saying to himself, as he went:

"So even she has begun to notice something."

That knowledge alarmed him, although Enid was, as usual, jumping to a wrong conclusion, and

plunged deep down in misunderstanding. She looked upon surfaces of things, and was misled about all that dwell in depths. When Denison had told her the truth about his night errand, he had, almost instinctively, trusted in her instinctive misapprehension, her instinctive stupidity. To tell the truth was to be thought a liar. So he had not hesitated. And even now he was not seriously alarmed because of what his wife might say or think. Her cloud of suspicion concealed his real mental movements, his excursions of the heart. Those might be undertaken with safety in the night created by her unfounded jealousy, the thick darkness of her foolish sorrow about a chimæra. Enid herself had given into his hands the weapon of defence with which he could guard against her discovery of the truth. Why, then, was he afraid?

Because he realized thoroughly for the first time the upheaval in his own heart. By the outward he was enabled to measure accurately the inward. Enid had given him information about himself that previously he lacked. He began to know now thoroughly how it was with him, and he was greatly moved.

He went into his bedroom, locked the door, and sat down. The broad sunshine of a typically fine Egyptian afternoon rolled in upon him and filled

the room with dancing waves of light. His face looked gray in that environment of glory. From below rose the shrill cries of the Pyramid Arabs, loudly claiming their booty of arriving travellers, the grating snarl of bored camels forced to receive their living loads, the braying of donkeys and the noisy chatter of French, English, and American voices, bartering and bargaining, refusing and consenting. A piercing cry occasionally arose from an unaccustomed camel rider, whose nerves were not equal to her daring, and this wail was invariably succeeded by a shout of joyous laughter, proceeding from the lower level of donkey-back, and emanating from more cautious friends rejoicing in her distress.

Denison listened drearily. He felt so far away from it all, and so much afraid because of that.

These sounds of normal existence recurring day by day, as regularly as the sun rose, and the moon drew the tides of the sea, were such a mere and inappropriate accompaniment to his low-breathed song of life. But it was not so with others. And therein lurked a sense of fear. If he was abnormal, was he not, perhaps, mad? How many other men and women, conscious of vital, root-and-branch difference between themselves and all those they think they know, have asked themselves that question?

His real interest centred not in the plain, obvious facts, and definite accomplishments of life, but in the suggestions, vague and inexplicable, given to him by the inanimate creatures of the world, by that great society of breathless beings whom man thinks himself above, and whom he sometimes himself creates.

They touched him as men seldom did. They uplifted him as no loving woman, no faithful friend had ever uplifted him. They hastened to the birth thoughts, desires, yearnings that seemed to indicate the dawning in him of a soul, the birth of a strange greatness. For their enforced and immense reticence, their everlasting and delicious reserve, never to be broken through nor brushed away, prevented the complete knowledge that destroys imagination, and, too often, destroys with it love.

Denison knew that he was not natural. Generally, however, any abnormal feelings that from time to time attacked him were not long sojourners, did not become painfully definite, or concentrate themselves and tend towards producing any continuous series of acts.

But now it was different. His inherent tendency, always known of by him, sometimes given the rein for a moment, generally held strictly in check, had suddenly turned the tables upon

him, gripped him, governed him, shaken him as a tempest shakes a tree. Like a Phaëthon, it sprang up to drive his chariot of the sun; but he had no Zeus to hurl a thunderbolt for him, and he himself was still in the chariot, and must be driven in strange places by day and night.

The peculiarity that he had always been conscious of, and had sometimes wondered at, was no longer vague and indefinitely slight. It had given birth to a passion that was almost a fury. Denison was in love with that stone mystery of the sand and the old years, with that everlasting wonder of which men have chattered through the ages. It had taken possession of him, and driven him to acts that would only be explicable to the world were they undertaken for some living being's sake.

Night after night he had crept out into the desert to be alone with that stone incarnation in which a wonderful soul had surely taken up its abode. During the day it began to torture him to think of the irreverent tourists surrounding it, commenting, dispraising, of the greedy Arabs lounging before it, indifferently flinging stones in its face, counting over their gains beside it. For he was jealous, as a lover is jealous of his mistress—jealous of a stone image! He laughed to himself in the sunshine with a sort of horror, as he acknowledged

it. Over and over again he had had to keep guard over his tongue when visitors in the hotel discussed that silent personality, spoke of its rough ugliness, of its wounds dealt by time and by man. Over and over again his irritation had deepened into an excitement that threatened to become ungovernable. Once, even, he had nearly struck his wife that evening on the veranda, for a chance word of contemptuous comment.

And then, like a lover, he was beginning to grow uneasy during all the hours he was forced to spend removed from the being he worshipped so vainly, so madly. When Enid pottered round the Cairo bazaars, buying a scent-bottle made of a hollowed amethyst here, bargaining over a length of Persian embroidery there, spending hour after hour amid wonders that recalled the Arabian Nights, Denison endured pain that became almost physical. And as they drove home in the after-glow of the Eastern evening down the long, straight road bordered by the murmuring acacia-trees, his heart was stirred by a rapture of eagerness, the expression of which he only curbed by a violent effort. As the green of the cultivated plain melted into the sterility of the desert, and, peering sideways past the dusky coachman, he caught a glimpse of the neutral tinted sands beyond the springing vegetation, he

pressed his hands together, and a sigh burst from his lips. His longing was so near realization.

When his wife spoke of leaving the hotel, and of their settled journey up the Nile, he understood partially the violence of his crazy passion of the imagination; and that day, in Cairo, he stole off alone and transferred their tickets to a much later date. He felt in that moment that he would have fallen to violence rather than leave the hotel and the desert hollow in which the wondrous being crouched. And now this scene with his wife, in which he learnt that she was at least consciously endeavouring to get upon the track of his secret, brought him to a full sense of his true condition, and of the way in which it must be regarded by the world.

He leaned his head upon his hands, and he asked himself how it would end. For he was no longer completely master in the house of his soul. The strange love of that which cannot articulately express itself, which had caused him to worship certain flowers, to dream for days about a picture, to go his way haunted by the memory of a statue, had seized upon him like some steadfast wild beast. Could he combat it? Could he wrench his soul away from the teeth and claws?

He sat there alone and asked himself the ques-

tion, and he answered that he could—but not at once. He must give way a little longer, wander a little further down the paths of fantasy. For a few days, or a few weeks, Enid must endure—ignorantly—the presence of that mighty rival hewn in stone. But if she learned his secret, she would believe him mad, the victim of some terrible delusion of the brain. She would summon doctors, would rush to her friends. The story of his passion would be carried on the wings of rumour far and wide over the world. He shuddered at the thought, shuddered in the glare of the sun. His beautiful, reverent adoration, so full of awe, so pregnant with worship, so mystical, necessarily so untainted by impurity, would be a theme for more than wonder—for pity, for the ridicule even of the children who believe in the fairies. At all costs the secret must be kept, and Enid had unconsciously pointed out a way of safety. Mrs. Aintree and her son should be his passion's shelter. He would make himself indispensable to Guy, whose illness of mind and body became more apparent day by day.

Denison had no desire to inflict unnecessary pain upon Enid. Her only fault was stupidity, which is, after all, the cardinal sin of creation. It would be cruel, and grossly insulting to Mrs. Aintree, to admit or encourage Enid's suspicions of an intrigue.

They were founded on air. They must be dispersed, if possible, into air. And in their place should stand the pale and tragic figure of the dying boy, claiming Enid's pity in the loneliness of his journey towards the unknown, looking to Denison for the sympathy which he, of all men, was perhaps the least fitted to extend to a traveller who was leaving behind the conditions which he so hated and despised.

CHAPTER IX.

FROM this time Denison became more deliberate, more guarded, acting his part in a drama with a careful attention to *nuances*, an observation of light and shade, that at least did credit to his cunning. The assumption of a difficult *rôle* pleased his intellect and distracted his mind. Insensibly, almost, he slid into greater happiness. He was playing with the fire of two women's intuitions, and it was necessary to be very careful lest the flame should touch him. Enid's intuitions were generally wrong, it is true, but Mrs. Aintree backed up hers with an acuteness of observation that was not to be trifled with. Like Sister Anne, she stood in a watch-tower, and afar off perceived the coming of an emotion into a heart, the riding of a feeling into a mind. She loved and studied men and women, as Denison hated and studied them, but love assists penetration quite as much as hate sometimes. Denison understood and feared her humanity. Fortunately, however, she was much occupied with her son. He was

the central figure in every picture she looked at. Denison could only be a shadow in the background. He meant to be a subtle shadow, ever on the alert. If he must be a victim to the distortion of his own soul, at least the sacrifice must remain unsuspected. No smoke should rise from the altar, no flame should gleam to the eyes of any watcher. And so, against a background of stone, the drama of flesh and blood, of pulsing hearts and unquiet minds, began to play itself out.

Sometimes Denison, looking upon that background, thought of it as typical. What life has not its background of stone? Guy Aintree's was death, Enid's his indifference, his—— And the same strange motive power prompted each to beat against the rock, uselessly and more dangerously than any sea that is thrown back from the cliff, clouding the air with spray. What creeping, punily-agitated ants they were—ants in the sandhills at the foot of a great mystery! He laughed bitterly, looking at himself and at them from the distance of his inhumanity, noting the incessant activity that led to so little result, the perpetual impatience that could never lead patience captive, the striving and struggling that merely filled the atmosphere with a faint dust thrown in the face of the great sunshine. And sometimes he asked himself whether the great sun-

shine was not typical too, whether it had not a mystery and a meaning. But that was only in his less natural moments, when impulse faded, and he was like the average man in the street rather than like himself. You cannot beat yourself against sunshine, and so you ignore it, as you ignore an enemy who is too weak to fight, or a friend who is too indifferent even to grasp your hand.

That at least was Denison's attitude of mind just then towards the perpetual glory that lay monotonously upon him. Its presence was often fantastically inappropriate. Feeling called for darkness, and Nature, with an unyielding prodigality, bestowed light. In brilliant light the ants toiled ceaselessly. But there was always the background of stone. That rested Denison, as the cool touch of marble rests the hot hand of a worker. Its immobility was profoundly peaceful. He grew to love the unyielding, to worship the incapacity for retreat, pursued by no human being. Men and women are perpetually giving way, giving up, at the least—giving. Surely, every act of generosity, or of timidity, degrades the donor. To satisfy is to change desire into delight, to transform an ardour into a peace. To Denison peace with plenty, a condition of things much desired of the majority, seemed as vulgar as a city feast decorated with hun-

gry aldermen. A life in which turtle was the predominant feature was no life to him. He turned from the green fat, after which most men hanker so busily, with a loathing that was perfectly genuine. He turned away, and supposed himself inevitably original for so doing. Yet, after all, he was only pursuing the old, the original search men devote themselves to as instinctively as a stream runs on to the sea—the search after the unattainable, peace. Only he was pursuing it in a peculiar way, in a way that at least dowered him with solitude.

He was in truth very solitary.

Apparently Enid had resigned herself. Whether her resignation was one of fear, or of suspicion gathering materials for action, was not apparent. That it was a resignation of piteous smiles the mere fact of her being Enid assured. Still, there were the smiles. They played in a watery way about Denison, and drew the sting of the sense of his own cruelty from his soul. He had his desire. That was necessary. But he did not wish Enid to suffer, and he sought to lull her into the gentle frivolity, the simple, innocent, and not ungraceful pettiness that seemed to satisfy the restrained exigence of her nature. Little details gratified Enid. Her day was a slate on which she kept calculating small addition sums. The totals were never large, but she did not

demand large totals, or even hope for them. Her mother, in Grosvenor Square, was also arithmetical, and also easily satisfied. A plump and quite stupid husband had been a sufficient joy to her for five-and-twenty years. She worshipped his double chin. It was a pillar of cloud to her by day, a pillar of fire by night, leading her always to lands flowing with milk and honey. Society admired her worship, and called her an admirable woman.

Denison felt now, often, that had he a double chin, Enid would have been prepared to worship it. The knowledge could only irritate him. But it was his duty, and his safety, to give his wife plenty of units to add up on her slate. So Enid learned to play golf, went to tea-parties in Cairo, shopped incessantly, was encouraged to lunch at the Ghesireh Palace, to ride in the desert. Denison drowned her in details with a dexterity and ingenuity that kept him infinitely bored and irritated. It was the price he had to pay for his strange moments of happiness. And Enid accepted the details with an apparent mild voracity, watching her husband all the time.

Mrs. Aintree, at odd moments, had begun to watch him too. Denison knew that well, and dreaded her eyes far more than those of his wife. She had, at first sight, grasped the fact that he was

an original man, set apart by some circumstance of mind rather than of body, from his fellowmen, but she had not yet decided fully what that circumstance was. At first she idly wondered, scarcely caring definitely to know. Denison was only an acquaintance, encountered in a land in which to be very definite, very practical, seemed almost a sin against nature. But her acquaintanceship with him deepened rapidly into friendship, more especially after the midnight scene between husband and wife. She was drawn to Denison by her boy's initiative; he to her by his desire to use the Aintrees as a cloak to cover his one-sided intrigue with a lifeless personality. But there was another foundation for their friendship, for each must, under any circumstances, have had some interest for the other.

Denison had not yet taught himself to walk entirely in another world—a world of silent beings, dumbly expressive. He made excursions thither. He told himself that really he dwelt there perpetually, but an original woman could still give him moments of forgetfulness, moments even of eagerness. The detective walked still, in changing disguises, through his nature, watching, summing up, tracing out clues, drawing deductions. His intercourse with Mrs. Aintree might be only a game to wile away an hour. Yet now and then he lost himself

in the game, and more than an hour glided by before he marked its flight. And then he sneered at himself quietly, or wondered at himself, as a Pharisee might have wondered if, by accident, he had smitten his breast, and, forgetfully, owned himself a sinner.

Mrs. Aintree found Denison increasingly original as she knew him better, but the main fact of the man eluded her perpetually, and she was aware of it, and puzzled by it. She believed ardently that every nature is based upon a main fact, some pervading virtue, or some pervading sin, the keynote of the Symphony, the key colour of the Kaleidoscope. What was Denison's? She could not tell. He chose to hide it. Only sometimes he was injudicious in this, that he allowed it to be seen that he was hiding it. She could hear the rustle of the covering cast over the mystery, the creaking of the cupboard door as it was shut upon the skeleton.

Then her eyes rested on him for a moment with a quick curiosity, and he understood the sensations of the undetected criminal, who intrigues to keep possession of that agony, the fear of detection. But the curiosity of Mrs. Aintree as to the secret of Denison's nature was only occasional, as his interest in her flew strongly at moments, and often fluttered feebly to the ground. She was mainly concentrated

on her son's condition, mainly devoted to the painting with colours of the black shadow that stood always by him. As Dension threw a sop of details to Enid, so she threw a sop of details to Guy. The boy was ravenous for what he called "life." He howled after it like a wolf after a flying sledge, was unwearied as a wolf in the chase. And Mrs. Aintree still preserved the curious attitude towards him for the adoption of which she had given Denison the reason. The hotel was inclined to stand aghast at her conduct. Tourists and travellers scanned her with an acrid surprise and condemnation.

At first two or three ladies, even an occasional elderly man—entrenching himself in the gray fortress of age with rudeness, miscalled frankness, as companion—ventured to condole with her on her possession of a scapegrace son, or to advise her as to the best measures to be taken for his improvement, and repression. They never repeated the experiment. She dismissed their pity and their projects with a quiet completeness that struck home to their vanity, and left them her polite foes. The impression grew that she was too original to be correct, and murmurs of heredity diverted the stream of pity from her towards her son. If the sins of the fathers can be visited upon the children, no doubt the mothers can also bequeath undesirable

legacies. Tendencies are sown in the seasons of childhood by those engaged in the mysterious process called "bringing up." Poor boy! He had probably never had a chance.

Guy Aintree's lack of a chance was much discussed in the sun on the veranda, on the golf-links, and in the avenue of acacias, and Mrs. Aintree became conscious that she was hardly *au mieux* with those around her. She only wondered, as she had wondered at intervals all her life, why people are so fond of brutality of feeling, so devoted to violence of thought. Perhaps it was because civilization denied to them violence of action. The butcher is sometimes a mild man compared with the passionate vegetarian. However, their violence meant little to her. It only led her to put them aside, and perhaps concentrated her more upon Denison than might otherwise have been the case. With Enid she believed herself to be good friends. Enid had borrowed her sun spectacles, and had recommended her to a Persian merchant who sold cheap turquoises in the bazaars. Such advances meant much from such a nature. They talked together about the monotony of the Egyptian weather quite naturally and pleasantly, and Enid had even once spoken of her mother in Grosvenor Square. Her efforts after Christian charity were

meritorious. Mrs. Aintree merely thought that Enid was slightly more subtle than the other women in the hotel, or that Denison had given her a hint as to why matters stood as they did between mother and son.

Enid was really actuated by two opposing motives—a desire to make the best of things, and a desire to gauge the attractive powers of Mrs. Aintree. The little wife had her moments of violent and childish jealousy, but they were only moments. She was not a very vain woman. Still, she could not help feeling that she was very pretty each time she glanced at Mrs. Aintree. That a face whose original smooth contours had been roughened by thought might possibly be more beautiful to some men than a delicately finished mask, all dimples and dainty colour, did not occur to Enid for a moment. In personal attractions Mrs. Aintree could not compete with her. But Enid had read in books of emanations from the mind, of strange, nameless fascinations that some women send out from them as the spider sends out threads. Such women can spin a web that never parts with a once caught victim. Was Mrs. Aintree one of these? Enid gazed at her in the sunshine on the veranda, and tried to feel certain one way or the other. But the sun seemed to get in the way

like a broad golden creature, all sparkle and shimmer. It was impossible to be certain.

One afternoon the two women drove in to Cairo together, lunched at Shepheard's, and went afterwards to see and hear the howling dervishes. Guy Aintree had gone out riding early in the morning, saying carelessly that he might turn up if he found himself in that direction. Denison remained at Mena House. He declared that he had important letters to write to England. The two women left him cutting quill pens in a determined manner. As their arabeeyah rattled along the straight road, the tassel on the fez of the brown coachman dancing merrily in response to the energetic movements of his head as he threw hoarse "Oo-ahs" to right and left of him, Mrs. Aintree said:

"Your husband seems to have a sort of horror of sight-seeing."

Enid sighed softly, spreading her parasol to the sun.

"Yes. Harry is not like other people. And he never even pretends to be like them."

"Your voice sounds regretful, Mrs. Denison. Would you wish him to be imitative, and of set purpose?"

"Oh no," said Enid, with a plaintive loyalty. "He is right, and they are wrong. I am sure of

that. Yes, of course. But—but—it makes things pleasant to be like other people, I think.”

Mrs. Aintree smiled, indicating to her companion an immoderately fat Turk on an immoderately thin donkey, as if the acute contrast caused her mirth.

“It is best to be a monkey if you are among monkeys? I am not sure that I think so. At any rate, insincere imitation is surely despicable. I sometimes wish that young men, and young women, too, could spend a year—the year before their *début* into the world—in the study of their own natures, their own desires, and what the gratification, or otherwise, of those desires would be likely to lead to. It might induce them to strike out a line for themselves without a slavish regard for the prejudices of others. Young men are nearly all cut on a pattern, although they are not pattern young men. From the age of twenty-three to thirty they are as much alike in mind as in coat-tail, to all appearance. And young women are equally afraid of themselves. Why should we be so much ashamed of our own souls?”

“I don’t know, I’m sure,” Enid said rather feebly.

“Now, your husband is that *rara avis*, an original man. He knows what he wants, what are the

necessities of his nature, and he doesn't care whether they are necessities to other people or not."

"But he doesn't always know what he wants," Enid remarked, rather abruptly. A sudden idea of being adroit, even crafty, seized her. She would sound her companion. She stole a glance at Mrs. Aintree's dark and speaking face, and eager flashing eyes, and went on: "He changes his mind very curiously sometimes."

"Usurps the prerogative of women?"

"Yes. When we first came to Egypt he could not bear the idea of staying at Mena House."

"Really!"

"It was because of the Sphinx."

Mrs. Aintree looked decidedly puzzled.

"Harry felt he should hate the Sphinx because it is one of the wonders of the world. I was quite afraid he would be rude to the Arabs about it."

"And now he does not hate it?"

Enid looked up sharply, but Mrs. Aintree's face wore an expression of serene unconsciousness.

"I don't know. I have never asked him. But he is very fond of Mena House—very fond. He cannot bear the notion of leaving it."

And again Enid ran her eyes over her companion's face, and again she was baffled. No signs of guilt started to the view.

"What is the great attraction to him?" said Mrs. Aintree.

"I wonder," Enid answered.

"Or perhaps your husband does not seek for great attractions in life, and so is content to live for a while in the sunshine, like the lizards who find the warm stone a paradise."

"I don't think Harry is at all like a lizard," Enid said decidedly.

Mrs. Aintree could not resist the conclusion that her sense of humour was undeveloped.

After luncheon, as they drove through unfinished-looking roads towards the mosque of the dervishes, Enid made one more timid excursion into artfulness.

"You are clever at reading character, I suppose, Mrs. Aintree?" she began.

"I don't know that I am. Probably the average palmist could beat me at it. Why do you ask?"

Enid fenced the question. At least she thought she was fencing it when she replied:

"It is very easy to make mistakes about people, especially about men. Men say much more than they mean."

"Some men—yes. Others mean more than they say, and do more than they mean. They are the species who act the part of fire and sword to the in-

nocent villages in the plains of Society. Great men are those who do what they mean—no more.”

Her reply threw Enid into a confusion, and checked all continuity in her mental proceedings. Her intention had been to cunningly convey an impression that Harry was a man about whom it was easy to make mistakes, that a polite sense of his duties towards society often kept him dancing—metaphorically—against his will, that he practised an assumption of interest in the affairs of those around him, which he was very far from really feeling. In fact, Enid had set out to slip into Mrs. Aintree’s mind the idea that Harry was not to be trusted, except, of course, by his wife. But she could not get any further, and Mrs. Aintree was obliged to wonder what she had been going to say, and what was the cause of the pretty silence that now overtook her.

So they drove on towards the mosque. The approach to it is very dingy and dirty, and the dust created by the carriages preceding theirs billowed round them in waves that nearly choked them. At last they turned into the open space before the building, whose walls and cupola suggested a huge mud-pie, fashioned by giants, and set to bake in the sun. The troops of beggars promptly fell upon them, dogs ran between their feet, filthy hands grasped their gowns, and a huge ape of threatening aspect

strained at its chain and snarled furiously behind its tattered muzzle.

It was with difficulty that they extricated themselves from the mob, wolfish, one-eyed, twisted, scrofulous, deformed beyond the dreams of pantomime grotesques. Their manner of doing so illustrated plainly enough their differences of character.

Mrs. Aintree entered the long covered passage that leads to the courtyard, with the sparkling eyes and buoyant step of one emerging from a successful combat, bracing, even amusing, one that woke up the energies, and set the pulses beating. The little new experience amused her. Her dress was not disarranged, nor was her large and daring hat awry.

Enid, on the contrary, stumbled in with the shattered demeanour of one in full flight—every detail of her toilet seemed to have suffered in the turmoil. Her cheeks were flushed with fright; childish tears stood in her eyes. The advances of the ape had completely unnerved her. The filthy hands of the Arabs had patted her into a condition approaching hysterics. A sudden protective instinct was born in Mrs. Aintree as she noticed her distraction—was born then and endured long afterwards, when the occasion for it was much greater. That combat with the beggars was one of the prophetic trifles that life throws to us from time to time, and that we

seldom heed, preferring to pay charlatans to gull us at ten-and-sixpence an hour.

Mrs. Aintree stopped Enid in the courtyard and, with deft hands, put her to rights, while the poor, pretty child brokenly inveighed against the maltreatment she supposed herself to have undergone. Instinctively she clung for a moment to the older woman. It was only for a moment. Then she recovered herself, and they entered the oval building with its white stone walls and high arched roof pierced with lattices. A few people were there, and, gladly dropping the chairs they had carried with them, they sat down beyond the circle of mats and waited.

CHAPTER X.

DENISON congratulated himself on the departure of his wife and Mrs. Aintree. The shining hours of the day were his now, his very own. As the arabeeyah rattled away down the little hill and disappeared into the shadows of the acacias, the quill pen was thrown aside and fell upon the floor.

Those important letters would certainly never reach England. England! The very name meant nothing to him, as he glanced out of the window across the hot white road to the hunched and hooded figures of the Arabs lurking at the base of the Great Pyramid—a misty island hidden in the dark winter of an angry cloud-arched sea, hidden from the sunshine, hidden from this bright sky, this ardent, living warmth.

What had he to do with it? He leaned from his window and pictured it with the sea-birds screaming from the storm-wrack, with the black and white waves roaring on the rocks. The sound of rain beating on a thousand window-panes of

dingy town houses sang in his ears. The lurid glare of torches fighting the fogs leapt to his eyes. And then he stretched his hands out, as if he would grasp the sunshine and shake it through his fingers like golden sovereigns, and he asked himself if there was any England at all. It seemed impossible.

Beneath him, in the road, the camels were lying doubled up, wearily regarding the desert with their heavy invalid's eyes. The donkeys stood together in patient coteries, striving in vain to free their heads from the tightened reins that forced them to look spirited and alert. In pale blue and white groups, camel-drivers, donkey-boys, and the vendors of images and spurious coins and curiosities, chattered of women and of money—as apparently they will chatter so long as Egypt lasts. The dry, thin air stood still in the sun. Denison thought of it as a brown, scorched sentinel erect at his post. Was there indeed an England? Surely not.

He took his terai hat and his umbrella and went out into the morning. The Arabs knew him now and had ceased to worry him, reserving their swarthy blandishments for the strangers from Cairo, on whom they fell like hordes of wolves, fighting with their closest friends, with their relations, tussling even with their fathers and grandfathers for

the possession of the unhappy tourist. He passed through them unheeded, and was soon in the desert. Its monotony was beautiful to him, as at first it had been wonderful. Long ago, at some London concert, he remembered sitting in the midst of a forest of ladies' hats, stifled by the sickly heat created by humanity in rows, and hearing a great singer declaim the words: "In deserts all is silence." Then the orchestra told in the music of Félicien David the great monotony of the wastes of sand. The caravan bells tinkled. The night came with its marvellously bright stars. There was a far-off sound of dancing, and a voice sang of darkness and of dreams. And the forest of ladies' hats rustled. Plumes and flowers nodded. There was applause. The conductor, scarlet with exertion, turned in his frock-coat and his bright blue tie, and bowed violently with an increasing smile. And Denison got up from his seat and went out, striving to keep in his soul the bells of the caravans, the far-off sound of dances, the darkness and the dreams. In the street the cabbies shouted to him, "'Ere you are, sir!" and tiny filthy boys offered him matches, saluting him with the unholy title of "Major." A lady in brown plush and a red bonnet asked him to come and buy her a pair of gloves. And the bells died away, and the caravan was gone, and the stars

faded, and the dances were over. Only the omnibuses passed in scarlet and green processions, and the rain began to drip from a gray sky. A horse fell down, and a policeman, with a surly exclamation, pinned its head in the gutter. A piano-organ played Mascagni's "Intermezzo." Denison sighed and bought an evening paper, in which he read of a great fire in Putney, and of a murder in a back street near Drury Lane.

Now he was in the desert, and the weird music of David sounded once more in his ears. He wandered among those strange-looking hillocks that somehow suggest unfinished building operations, and descended into the narrow clefts of sand, from which all view is blotted out, in which only silence and sunshine dwell. His progress was an aimless one of hesitant footsteps. Sometimes he stood still for awhile. In one of the sand valleys he sat down and basked in the warmth like a human lizard, empty of thought as an animal that is completely at one with the earth and the scheme of creation. But, wandering in half-circles that diminished perpetually, he drew gradually near to the Sphinx, until the back of the mighty stone head rose out of the sand to his eyes. Then he stood still again, gazing silently. There was a monstrous dignity in that ugly shape, a dignity so overpowering as to be

sinister, serenely sinister, as are all supreme manifestations of will. Denison's thought flew to Frankenstein and his live monster. Why had he breathed into his creature the useless gift of which men are so fond, which they cling to with exultation, and part from with cowardly murmurings and with tears?

The truest greatness lay in the creation of an enormous and powerful silence, a silence that may be felt that embraces and soothes, and is rest to all unquiet souls.

He drew nearer, treading very softly in the sand, as men tread when death is in a house, or a great sorrow or fear.

And the sinister power of the presence seemed to increase with each forward step, sucking him in towards it, as a tide sucks in a twig. His eyes grew bright and eager, and the breath fluttered in his throat. This solitary procession was a march to a glory, to an ultimate realization full of all satisfaction. But as he reached the Sphinx the vile uproar of tourists fell upon his ears, excitedly screaming to one another from their donkeys, laughing, peal upon peal, chaffing the radiant donkey-boys at the pitch of vulgar voices.

Denison turned hastily and fled, and, in a moment, his mind was shaken and changed. The joy

in his solitude left him, and a sarcastic determination took its place. He would be as the other people, as Enid, as Mrs. Aintree. There were omnibuses, and dirty boys, and fires, and murders in Egypt, as in England. That mob of tourists personified them all. The mind that sought romances, dances, and dreams in the daylight, was the mind of a fool. •

He hastened to the hotel and ordered a carriage.

“To the Mosque of the Howling Dervishes!” he cried, feeling a grim satisfaction as he said the words.

If he could not have the extreme of silence he would at least have the extreme of sound, a noise not entirely unmeaning, not entirely purposeless. The rattling of the arabeeyah pleased him in his present mood. He carried on a shouted conversation with the merry driver, whose brown throat was wrapped in a shawl with fluttering edges broken into a fringe. As they neared the bridge, and the crowd of natives was tintured with a throng of sight-seers pouring towards the Pyramids, he amused himself by scanning the people and noting their humours.

The gravity of the Turks, perched behind grand Russian horses, seemed as great an assumption as the wild, unseemly gaiety of four portentously fat

elderly Frenchwomen, who giggled in shrill soprano voices under their hats covered with flowers, and played with their fans like young girls. Handsome Englishwomen in straw hats, shirts, and neat habits, cantered past, attended by officers, or escorted by grooms, bringing a breath of London and of the Row with them. Two Americans, with chin beards and hats shaped like sugar-loaves, trotted past on small donkeys, conversing nasally with jerks. One of the donkeys bucked, and the word "Sphinx" was broken up into two syllables.

Denison frowned and leaned back in his carriage, withdrawing himself into an abstraction that lasted as he flashed past Shepherd's with its thronged veranda and its multitude of dragomans.

"What a grim-looking man!" said a young girl to her brother, who was too busy returning the arch glances of a languorous Italian in a white gauze veil to make any reply.

When the carriage drew up at the mosque, Denison, still in a dream, mechanically got out and made his way into the courtyard. A huge dervish, with a matted mane of dirty black hair, handed him a chair to carry in with him, and he paid for it and took it up in his fingers, not feeling any weight. But he did not enter through the arched door immediately. He was listening to the sounds that

reached him from within. The proceedings had just begun, but he did not know that. A high, hoarse voice, peculiarly piercing in quality, was intoning through the silence words that conveyed nothing to Denison and yet affected him as he stood there. The intervals taken by this voice seemed infinitesimally small, shrunken to less than the semitones of our scale. Falling downwards by these diminutive steps, the voice paused, snarling, at last, then mounted, or rather scraped, its passage up again to a shrill and piercing note, driven through the nose with intense force. A pause followed, and then a deep, thick growl—fourfold, it seemed to Denison. The growl died away in a ragged mutter, and the solo voice began again, louder than before.

Denison's mind was in an Italian church at Rome, listening to Mass said by an angry priest fighting with a bad cold. A shrouded man at the door touched his shoulder and pointed, telling him to enter. And he did so, walking gently and carrying his chair. The oval chamber contained a semicircle of staring travellers, broken here and there by an empty space. Within, upon a floor of mats, knelt five or six robed figures, swaying gently backwards and forwards with an absolute regularity of motion that immediately fascinated the eyes. In-

side the circle was the man of the crying voice, an old sheikh with piercing dark eyes and whitened hair. Two others stood near him.

Without looking round for his wife and Enid, Denison sat his chair down and gave himself up to the strange ceremony, lost instantly in the passion of the gazer. The voice affected his nerves intimately, as intimately as if it had glided a rough hand over his bare body. Now and then the other voices broke in with the snorting growl that seemed to come from some wild animal, forced to utterance by a fierce, imperative impulse. Gradually more dervishes slunk in furtively from the courtyard and dropped on their knees, immediately falling into the swaying motion that was now becoming slightly, almost imperceptibly, more pronounced. The long hair of some of them slipped from beneath their turbans and hung upon their lean shoulders. One man put up a hand and tore the covering from his head as if its weight were unbearable. And still the high voice screamed its way up and down the scale till it was like a small sharp knife hacking at Denison's brain. Once or twice he caught himself shaking his head and moving his hands as if to drag the little knife away. The swaying figures communicated to him a desire of monotonous movement that impelled him to imitate them. He re-

sisted. But presently it was as if someone took hold of him by the shoulders and slightly pushed him to and fro. He glanced at some tourists near him, but they were sitting upon their chairs apparently quite unmoved. One of them was smiling with an expression of calm superiority. Another put his hand into his waistcoat and looked at his watch. The third, an elderly lady in a large black bonnet, glistening with bugles, and flowers that might have been made of spar, fumbled in a pocket at the back of her gown, pulled out a handkerchief, and sonorously and repeatedly blew her nose. Denison looked away and instinctively shrugged his shoulders. Now a small, exquisitely made man, clad in a straight, lemon-coloured robe that almost touched the ground, stole into the circle with extended arms, and began slowly to spin round. He remained precisely on the same spot. If his feet had been set in a plate they would not once have left it. The dervishes, of whom there were by this time fully forty, stood up, and a strange excitement seemed gradually but surely overtaking them. They stole glances at one another, glances sinister, furtive and bizarre, as if each man were conveying some warning or watchword to his neighbour. The howls that broke from their lips at regular intervals came with increasing force to Denison's ears.

Short and hard they struck him like a blow on the face. He waited for them with a growing anxiety, trying to calculate precisely the moment of their emission. Now the shout was on a high note, now it was like a violent and prolonged snore—a noise so malignant, so evil, that each time it came Denison felt as if he witnessed the commission of a crime.

He was no longer merely an excursionist who had paid to be present at an exhibition of world-wide fame. He was no longer a looker-on, in mind. As the uproar grew, as turbans were cast frantically to the ground, and manes of hair were shaken furiously out, as the swaying bodies swung forward and back till it seemed that the brown necks must be broken at each hideous motion, as the cymbals clashed and the tomtoms were beaten, Denison was seized with a frenzy that at first filled him with pleasure. The wild, unmeaning din came to him as one great combination of all the sounds of life pushed to their extremity, to their ultimate note. All the useless words, all the angry outcries, all the passionate reproaches, all the unceasing quarrels, all the whispered threats, all the sneers, and refusals, and wails, and oaths and defiances that go to make up the huge symphony of the human music of the world were concentrated in this oval chamber, with

the white walls and the lattices, through which peered at intervals the dark eyes of veiled faces. And the man in the lemon-coloured robe, spinning with a velocity that rendered him merely a flash of pale, uncertain colour on the surface of sound, was an emblem of the fretful, spinning globe, whirling through space everlastingly, environed by everlasting uproar. The nasal voice of the old sheikh still strove to be heard, screaming up and down that alien scale, but it was drowned as much, Denison found himself fancying, by the passionate motions of the dervishes as by their maniacal shouts. And he swam in the uproar as a bather swims in the sea, resting his body grandly on the yielding vehicle that supports him, rising and dipping, sinking below the surface into the depths and darting upward to shake the ripples from his hair. He could have shouted, too, at the pitch of his voice, and imagined that he did so. In reality he remained absolutely tense and still, as a man just mesmerized, to whom no suggestion has been made.

Had this orgie of sound ceased at this moment, Denison would surely have remembered it with a passionate exultation. But it was prolonged beyond the limits of his mood, and the sensitive nerves shuddered from delight into irritation. And as he gradually lost his pleasure in the ceremony,

the ceremony approached nearer and nearer to its climax. Every detail of it was monotonously accentuated. The old sheikh's voice grew more nasal and piercing, the clash of the cymbals, the thunder of the tomtoms, more perpetual. The half-circle of devotees, partially veiled in flying hair, gave themselves up to the very madness of motion. The man in the lemon robe whirled almost to the point of invisibility, and the air seemed to swell with noise like a bladder that is filled with gas till it bursts. What had been passion became brutality. An anger took hold on Denison, a gradual hatred of this frightful tempest of sound, a gradual hatred of all sound. Often something abnormal, something exaggerated, leads us by its extravagance to hate the normal, the unexaggerated seed from which the unnatural flower has blossomed under the fostering care of over-cultivation. So now this exaggeration of sound led Denison to hate the very idea of utterance, to hate it till the perspiration burst out upon his face, and he was carried away by an intensity of useless rage. Silence, silence—that was the only blessing. And these madmen prosecuted their frantic devotions in the land of that great silence! And travellers came to listen and to enjoy. What a sacrilege! What a sacrilege! It was a crime, he thought, a crime against

the spirit of the desert, the spirit of the great spaces that are the very homes of silence. But the uproar increased steadily, unvaryingly, until he felt as if he must take some action, do something to stop what he so hated and despised. Mechanically he stretched out his arm threateningly. It was seized by the elbow. He turned abruptly, recalled to himself in a moment. Mrs. Aintree stood at his side. Her hand was upon his arm. Her eyes were looking steadily into his.

"Will you come with us?" she said. "We are going."

There was a watchful expression on her face, such as Denison remembered to have observed on the faces of the keepers in a lunatic asylum he had once visited. It had seemed to him then to render all the men alike, as all men look alike in an audience shaken by some simultaneous emotion.

"Will you come?" she whispered again. "Your wife is waiting outside. She is frightened."

Without a word he followed her into the courtyard. Enid was there in a state bordering on hysteria. Her pretty face was flushing and her lips were trembling. When she saw her husband she caught hold of him with nervous violence.

"Oh, Harry, do take me away!" she said. "I am deafened and terrified! Oh, they are all mad-

men! They are mad! Let us get away from that hideous noise!"

"Yes, Enid," he answered quietly; "we will find the carriage."

They walked out into the sunshine, which blinded them after the twilight of the mosque, and were immediately beset by the importunate beggars. The man with the ape made towards them with greedy agility. Enid screamed, and Denison, turning suddenly, struck the fellow a passionate blow. All his nervous agitation found a vent in it. The man fell back, showering noisy exclamations upon them.

They made their way to the carriage at last. The horses were whipped up, and they dashed off, pursued by a faint din from the beggars and from the religious enthusiasts within the mosque. As they drove away they did not notice another carriage that met them. It contained a solitary figure—Guy Aintree. When it stopped among the beggars, he struggled from his seat with difficulty, stumbled across the sunlit space, and, with his hand on the wall, made his uncertain way into the mosque, just at the moment when the excitement of the dervishes culminated in frenzy.

CHAPTER XI.

THAT evening, soon after the *table-d'hôte* was finished, the boy was brought home to the hotel by an English stranger, pale, bruised, almost unconscious with fatigue and injury. The Denisons and Mrs. Aintree were sitting on the veranda when the carriage drove up, and in a moment they knew that something was wrong. The boy essayed to get out, but fell back on the cushions, and the stranger, a tall, stalwart Yorkshireman, fairly gathered him into his arms and lifted him up the steps. Even his mother could not restrain an exclamation when she saw him, and for the moment Denison believed that he was dying. He was carried at once to bed, and attended by the resident doctor, while the Yorkshireman, having gruffly told his tale, departed in much relief to Cairo. The boy had stumbled, drunk, into the mosque, and had seized hold of one of the dervishes, who, frantic with excitement, promptly attacked him with the fury of a wild animal. When he was rescued by the bystanders he was bleeding

from a wound in the head, and was unconscious; but, on examination, it was discovered that no serious injury had been done to him. His debauch, however, followed by the shock, completely prostrated him for the time, and he was kept in his room for several days, rebellious and despairing. This accident put an end to one of his dearest hopes, for while he was invalided the Ghesireh race-meeting came off, and he was, of course, unable to ride.

But this accident had other effects. From the moment when she saw him carried, half tipsy, and still stained with blood, into the hotel, Enid conceived a violent dislike of him, which she neither tried nor wished to combat. Many women are at their best in hours of sorrow, of tragedy, of degradation. They can bend in a passion of pity to the creature which is lying in the dust. But there are others who shrink instinctively from the mud in the roads of life, and can only walk happily over smooth-shaven lawns, and bask in the sunshine. The care of the wounded seems to them a low and hideous office. The ugliness of illness, the scars of the body, the dissipations of the mind, come to them as insults, as deformed and ragged beggars breaking into a drawing-room during a party.

Enid was one of these women. She had seen

Guy Aintree, with blood dried upon his face, struggling from the filthy embrace of drink. In her gentle way she hated him from that moment. The very thought of him was odious to her.

This hatred broke Denison's chief weapon of defence in his hand. When he spoke to Enid of the boy's condition, of the sorrows that stood round his youth like enemies, she answered that he had brought them upon himself, and was unworthy of any sympathy.

"I hate to think of him, Harry," she said one day. "When is he coming down again?"

"In a day or two, I suppose," Denison answered coldly.

She turned suddenly upon him with an appeal.

"Can't we go before then?" she asked. "We have become so intimate with these people. I shall have to talk to him, to sit with him. Ah!" She shuddered with disgust. "And he will always be horrible to me now. I shall always see the—the dreadful blood on his face; and he is so awfully ill. I have never been accustomed to invalids, Harry dear; mamma thought the sight of them so dangerous to a young girl's imagination."

"Imagination!" Denison interrupted sarcastically. "Do you lay claim to the possession of that monster, Enid?"

She looked puzzled.

"Why, everybody has one, of course, dear," she answered.

"Really! Then there is nothing more to be said. But do learn to control yours. Poor young Aintree won't do you any harm, and as to his mother, I thought you liked her."

Enid hesitated.

"Yes," she said at last, uncertainly. "She is kind and—and amusing; still——"

"Yes?"

"Still, she rather frightens me, I think. She stares so, and she does not agree with little things that are said, like other people."

"She is not a fool, Enid; and to be observant is not a crime."

"Of course you defend her, Harry," his wife said with a half-hearted bitterness.

"I am sorry for her," he answered. "Her position here is a difficult one. You ought to wish to render it easier."

And then he walked away, leaving Enid in considerable agitation.

For once he wished that his wife were as other women and did not think her so; for he, like many men whom he despised, or wondered at, held to the belief that sorrow will inevitably bring out the pity

and sympathy of the female sex. This lack of Christian charity in Enid more especially vexed him, since it struck a blow at his own happiness. Had she been normal—as he chose to name it—his position would have been rendered additionally secure by this last and most notable escapade of Guy Aintree's. It would have roused in Enid—it should have roused, he told himself—a sisterly feeling, prompting her to generous desires to help and console Mrs. Aintree.

But then, too, the character of the other woman fought against him. She was so self-reliant, so calm in difficulties. She demanded so little of anyone in her sorrow. Had she been a trembling, shrinking creature, she might have more easily claimed Enid's pity. Why was she in a sense so masculine?

The opposites in the two women—Enid's feebleness, Mrs. Aintree's strength—barred Denison's path of safety. Had the one been stronger, the other weaker, the present conjunction of circumstances must have drawn them together. Mrs. Aintree must have come to Enid for sympathy; Enid must have been roused to a protective chivalry; and Denison would have won without effort, without question, the right to stay in this place that so strangely held his soul.

How monstrous the petty, fighting details of different natures seemed to him in his great selfishness! Here, under his eyes, was a minute reproduction of the mighty civil war that fills all life with silent battle, four natures in a state of violent revolt—Guy Aintree battling furiously against inevitable death, himself inclined to thrust a poniard into the throat of life, and these two women, the one feebly attacking, the other strong in defence, a defiant figure, bravely hand-in-hand with sorrow.

For the scandal of Guy's last escapade had roused the proper feeling of the hotel inmates to boiling-point, and it was obvious that when the unfortunate invalid reappeared, he was to be shunned. His conduct was, naturally, regarded as shameful, and the very cause of it, his illness, rendered it the more reprehensible in the eyes of all. To be well and wicked is not right, of course, but there is something youthful, almost healthy, about it. Vigour sowing wild oats, with a strong hand and a swinging step, can be tolerated, even excused. But to be ill and wicked! All Mena House cried out against it—all Mena House, that is to say, except certain men of the class that accepts vice at any time more cheerfully than virtue. These thought the whole affair a charming joke, and longed for fresh developments, scenting "fun," as the properly

constituted dog scents offal. Meanwhile, the chief culprit being for the time invisible, his mother was forced to bear the brunt of the hotel's righteous wrath. Young girls looked at her under their eyelids, as if she were mysteriously improper for owning such a son. Elderly ladies stared at her and thought of heredity if she took a glass of *vin ordinaire* at dinner.

Denison almost found time to pity her. But she presented a serene front to Puritanism, smiled at misconception, and brushed malignant comment from her mind as easily as you brush a crumb from a tablecloth. When Guy did at length reappear he looked more haggard than ever. There was a sudden hush in the great dining-room as he walked slowly in to lunch. Pretty girls lowered their eyes; mothers seemed to expand like hens covering a brood from peril. The air trembled delicately with condemnation, and Enid drew in her under-lip.

Dennis noticed the little silent scene with a contempt that he did not try to conceal. He hated these people, not so much from their ill-bred demonstration of virtue, as for their entire lack of imagination. Not one of them understood, or even tried to understand, the boy's desolation. Not one of them sank into his mind for a moment, looked at things with his tired and morose eyes. And

then Denison said to himself that this general lack of imagination was one of the greatest evils that afflicted the world. Cruelty sprang directly from it. Selfishness blossomed from its earth, and bloomed, an everlasting flower. War, patriotism that slays patriots, intoleration that mocks devotees of diverse religions, greed that battens on others, chicanery, the vampire that drains the life-blood of the honest, what were they all but the puppet vices of stupidity, the stupidity engendered by this widespread lack? The unimaginative are the maniacs whom Mrs. Grundy clasps to her capacious bosom, and welcomes to her drawing-room full of antimacassars, photograph albums, and palms in brass pots. The cry of the children voices this deficiency, the shriek of the hare overtaken by the greyhound, the sob of the outcast woman of the streets, the laugh of her sister who sees her through the carriage windows, enthroned among the saints whose heaven is a moneyed chastity. And, thinking thus, Denison turned from his wife's drawn under-lip with a movement of unmistakable disgust, and devoted himself with an unusual alertness to the Aintrees.

Since the episode in the mosque of the dervishes, he had seen but little of Mrs. Aintree, who had been often invisible, shrouded presumably in the twilight

of the sick-room. Now, as he sat with her in the veranda, or strolled with her upon the golf-links, a conviction dawned in his mind that she began to regard him with a curious intentness, mingled, so it seemed to him, with a certain veiled uneasiness. Only so self-conscious a man as himself could have marked it, and at first he was doubtful of it, inclined to laugh at a voice falsely crying "Wolf!" within his suspicious mind. But with each fresh hour of intercourse he grew more sure that the voice uttered a warning to be regarded. He strove, at first in vain, to track the stream of her new manner with him to a source. Was it far away, or near? The stream was narrow, and flowed surreptitiously, yet he began to hear its distinct and continuous murmur, to listen and to wonder. He became watchful, too, and a constraint sprang up between them.

When two people walk together, each patiently intent upon analysis of the other, intercourse stumbles rather wearily on its way. The theatre requires its performers as well as its audience. Mrs. Aintree and Denison were both seated firmly in the stalls waiting each for the other to draw up the curtain. So no curtain was drawn up, and the stalls held impatience, but impatience far too well-bred to stamp a foot, or murmur a remonstrance. Denison felt certain that some injudicious action on his part was -

to blame for the presence of this audience expectant of his performance, but he could not at first recall it. He looked backward on the short stretch of road they had travelled together, and he saw no milestone. His mistake lay in searching the distance instead of the foreground. But he found the clue, or, rather, Mrs. Aintree gave it to him, one morning on the links.

They were not playing, so niblicks, putters, and the other instruments that seem to have been handed down to us from the times of the Jabberwock, did not encumber their freedom, or interfere with their enjoyment of the cloudless and radiant weather. Under their white umbrellas they sat, as usual, in the stalls, silently expectant. At some distance from them Enid and Guy Aintree drove or putted, joined in a game, the former unwilling, the latter tense with the determination to win. Mrs. Aintree withdrew her eyes from their sunlit backs with an expression that seemed to demand the accompaniment of a sigh. She did not sigh, however, but only said to Denison :

“He is so devoted to all games and sports. The drawing of a badger, a run across a stiff line of country, a day in the stubble, are perfect happiness to him. I am afraid your wife will not get much conversation out of him. I know he will be too in-

tent on beating her to bind up her wounds with words."

"Silence hurts no one," Denison said, speaking his thought, and unconsciously half out of that stall in which he had been sitting. "I wish there was a little more of it in the world."

"Surely there is plenty in Egypt? I never understood how wonderful silence can be until I took my first expedition into the desert."

"With a donkey-boy?"

"No; I was on horseback. Guy was with me. We rode for miles—it was near Abbaseeyah—and saw nothing but the sand, and, once, some moving Bedouins on the horizon."

"One ought to ride quite alone to know what the desert really has to say. These Easterns live in the midst of the great silence, and their only object is to kill that which they ought to cherish. I have never been so in hate with noise as in this land of deserts."

He spoke with a certain gathering irritation. She was still in the stalls, and thought she saw the curtain move, and a certain hopeful flare of the foot-lights.

"They do talk a good deal," she said lightly.

"They are destructively talkative. But they are

more. The exhibition at which we assisted the other day is a disgrace to Cairo."

"You mean——"

"The howling dervishes. I can perfectly understand the impulse that moved your son when he brought all that trouble upon himself."

"Ah, but Guy was not in a condition to be moved by reasonable impulses," she said quietly.

"Reasonable impulses may spring up in a very hazy, or very excited, mind," Denison answered, "or even in the mind of a maniac. Great lunatics have moments of a luminous insight that never brightens the pettifogging sanities of the normal. The world owes a debt of gratitude to many of those whom it delights to dub insane. Your son may not have been himself that day in the mosque. He may not have been able to reason or to argue, but he acted more rightly and sensibly in my opinion than the people who sanction the insanity of the dervishes by paying to be present at it."

"Ah!" she cried quickly, "then you were going to anticipate him?"

For a moment Denison glanced at her, puzzled. Then he had discovered the source of the stream.

"I see——" he said slowly, and paused.

She looked at him, saying nothing. The dark eyes were full of eagerness as they met his.

"You noticed the effect—the effect that hideous uproar had upon my nerves?"

He realized what he had not realized before—that Mrs. Aintree and Enid had, of course, been present in the mosque during the whole performance. Until Mrs. Aintree's hand touched his arm he had never thought of them. The strange scene before his eyes, the strange music in his ears, had entirely taken possession of him. And since that moment he had tried to put the mosque, and the horror of sound that it contained, out of his mind altogether.

"Where were you and my wife?" he asked, regarding her intently.

"Precisely opposite to you," she replied.

The curtain had been rung up. Now she hoped for the performance.

Denison sat for some time in silence; he perfectly understood now what had caused the slight change in Mrs. Aintree's manner towards him. She had had an opportunity of watching and analyzing him when he had been entirely unconscious of her presence, entirely self-absorbed. His reserve curled up, as a sea anemone curls up when an intrusive finger touches it in its pool. He wondered what he had looked like, how much of his real self he had childishly shown, while she sat observing

him across those turbulent fanatics. The detective heard the footfalls that dogged his down the street, and stopped to look behind him. He was followed by a woman. Should he ask her what she wanted?

"I did not see you," he said rather lamely.

"Nor did Mrs. Denison notice you," Mrs. Aintree said. "She was intent on the dervishes; they frightened her horribly, I think."

"At first they pleased me," Denison said, feeling a strong desire that she should express some opinion—allow him to have some idea how his unconsciousness had affected her. There was a considerable excitement, and even anger, in his mind; he hated to be observed closely in such circumstances. He almost hated the woman who had observed him. There was a look of keen, uneasy suspicion upon his face. "At first they pleased me. There was something grand in the fury of sound."

"Yes."

"But I confess they got on my nerves at last," he added, like one asking a question.

She said nothing. He wished that she would speak.

"You noticed that, of course?" he added at last.

"Yes," she said; then she glanced down, and

pushed the pointed toe of her boot into the grass hesitatingly. "Mr. Denison, I think I quite understand now the strong attraction you have for Guy," she said.

"What do you mean?" Denison asked in some astonishment.

"I began to understand it that day in the mosque. You are vexed at my having seen you; I know that. I could not help it; you planted yourself right in front of me."

She glanced at him with a smile half deprecating.

"Very few people can see what is right in front of their eyes," he said.

"Am I to be blamed for not being one of them?"

"Hardly."

"You sound a little doubtful. But—as I have said—I understand now the influence you have, or at least could have, over Guy."

"Whence does it spring, Mrs. Aintree? From what seed in my character do you imagine the flower to have grown?"

The question was distinctly defiant, so defiant that she might almost have been justified in resenting it. But she seemed absorbed, and answered gravely and directly:

"From your rare capacity for emotion."

"You are flattering me."

"No, no."

"Even if I were more emotional than most men, I fail altogether to see why that should attract your son, a Nimrod, a sportsman to his heart's core."

"Do you? I don't. My boy is a mass of nerves now. His mind is a furnace, heated red hot by disease. It burns the good people in the hotel. You can warm your hands at it. How I wish you could put it out! But you are not afraid if it, because——"

"Yes?"

"Well, there are coals of fire in you as well."

"What are they heated by?"

"How can I tell? I can only see a little way, note an effect without, perhaps, divining a cause. One thing I can tell, though."

"And what is that?"

"Your fires scorch people; and, if you had your will, would burn them all up, myself included, I verily believe."

"Mrs. Aintree," Denison said, and he had never spoken to her so gently, with so little sarcasm, and so much strength of feeling, "you may exclude yourself, and your son, from the holocaust."

He said nothing about Enid's fate. Would she perish by fire? Mrs. Aintree, womanlike, wondered. She only said, with obvious warmth:

"Thank you."

When they returned to the hotel, Denison was conscious of a certain novel sense of happiness. He laughed at himself as he analyzed it, and knew that, after all, he was only a human child, a sort of big boy, baby enough to be glad that he was even partially understood. Perhaps from that morning on the links Enid had slightly more cause for her jealousy than ever before.

CHAPTER XII.

THE moon made Egypt a white fairyland. In Cairo the minarets pointed like silver fingers to the sky. The Nile was a broad path of glory on which the shadowy boats lay in magical flotillas beneath the great wall of the Ghesireh Palace gardens, and beyond the river the road to the desert was an enchanted avenue, on which the weird forms of the sentinel acacias moved as if in some mysterious and sinister dance, executing silently strange figures invented by their dancing-master, the breeze. All along the river-bank the Arabs were chattering, singing sad and almost tuneless songs, as they smoked their cigarettes, laughing, playing like children, heedless of the silver mystery of the river. And the pariah dogs in the plain beyond the acacia-trees howled unceasingly, with the unrelenting persistence of machines made vocal.

Sometimes Denison, as he listened to them, told himself that their senses were more highly developed than those of their human masters; that,

perched upon the hard mud walls of the houses, they could see a thousand tenants of the night, invisible to the eyes of men, walking spirits, crouching demons of moonlight or of darkness, cloud nymphs and star fairies, perhaps the horrible mouths that come by night to whisper in the ears of men suggestions of nameless crimes to be done only in the darkness. On the walls the dogs stand hour after hour staring into the night world, and howling with a terrible insistence, as if to call attention to something that is happening near them in the spaces of the gloom. What is it that they see? What is it that they hear? Some bizarre wickedness of the night?

Beyond the acacia-trees lay an ocean with billows of silver, with shadows in the hollow bosoms of its waves—a silent ocean that held itself under moon and stars in a holy calm, motionless, grave, serene. When the breeze travelled softly over it no responsive movement came from the wave crests. When the breeze paused to whisper or sing to it no deep voice answered, ascending from hidden places drowsily, hoarse and weary with mystery. The desert is more silent than a painted sea, more serene than the lake that lies in a mirage by phantom forests and ghostly lawns. Its silence and its mystery press upon the heart like some soft weight, even as

a dream presses upon the soul of a sleeper, until he turns in his sleep and stretches forth his hands as if to push it from him. Denison felt the soft heaviness of the silence, but he loved it and yielded to it, shivering when a voice brushed it away and set him violently free from its tyranny.

"We're going to-night, old chap," the voice said in his ear. "The mater's game and Saïd's all ready for us. There's some use in a night like this when you can see to pot jackals. Are you coming?"

The voice was Guy Aintree's. Denison turned and looked at him. Never before had he been so struck by the weird and almost phantom-like appearance that illness had gradually given to the boy. The moonlight accentuated the sharp whiteness of his features, painted a black shadow in the hollows beneath his eyes, hardened the thin straight line of his dry mouth. Even Don Quixote could hardly have been so lean as was this young, tall figure, quivering with an unnaturally eager life. Vaguely, Denison, gazing at him, thought of the valley of dry bones, and of a picture he had once seen in which they gleamed through a purple haze pierced by pale tongues of flame. The words of the boy seemed strangely at issue with his appearance, for he talked slang and looked as vague and ethereal as a figure seen in a vision on the stage. While he

listened to him Denison almost expected that he would fade away into darkness.

"What are you staring at?" said the boy. "Anything wrong?"

"No," said Denison, with an effort; and smiling to himself bitterly at the irony of the question and his reply. "Nothing."

"You're coming, aren't you? It will be the deuce of a lark, even if we don't get one of those prowling beasts."

"Yes," Denison answered; "I will come."

There was something about Guy that compelled him strangely, despite his indifference to human suffering and human sympathy. Ever since he had recognised the resemblance between the boy's position and his own, he had set him apart from the rest of the world. The fact that Aintree, like himself, was in a perpetual condition of revolt, linked them together in his mind, even—it sometimes seemed—in his heart. So now he yielded to the boy's obvious expectation, although it fought with his own feelings. Aintree welcomed this wonderful moonlight merely because it helped him to see something that he could kill. His dark eyes were gleaming with a passionate, sick eagerness. He was on the eve of an expedition that would help him for a moment to forget, would deafen his ears so that

they could not hear the horrible, soft, unceasing march whose grim music was stealthily coming upon him, like the band of a destroying army, with far-off drums and trumpets to wake frightened foes by night. The gradual crescendo of that march kept Aintree awake writhing in his bed from midnight till dawn. Each night he heard it louder, and the sweat burst out upon his face, and he clenched his thin hands in the sheets, muttering curses under his breath.

Only sometimes fear and horror utterly overcame him, when the chill of the dawn penetrated into his room and rested, like a veil, over the bed, and he prayed for a moment. But through the fragmentary words of the prayer came the steady steps treading to the music, and the petition ended in an oath. To-night he would be free from the crowd of phantoms that thronged and hustled each other round his bed. Activity would drug his terror—the terror that he was too proud, boy-like, to speak of to anyone, even to his mother. A feverish wild joy took possession of him—sadder, surely, than any grief.

He pulled out his watch eagerly.

“Go and get your gun,” he cried to Denison.
“Oh, here’s the mater!”

Mrs. Aintree came out upon the veranda,

dressed for the expedition in a short tailor-made gown, a small soft hat, and a close-fitting jacket with a belt round the waist. She wore strong gloves with gauntlets. A small flask hung at her belt. Behind her, in evening dress and wrapped in a cloak fluffy with white fur, was Enid.

She went up to her husband.

"You are not going, Harry?" she said.

"Yes," he replied.

"But you don't care for shooting."

"Jackals are not partridges, Enid. The moon-lit desert is not a stubble. I care for shooting here."

"I will come, too," she said suddenly. "I will go in and change my dress."

But her husband did not acquiesce. On the contrary, he said decisively:

"I advise you not to, Enid. You know the very idea of a gun going off frightens you to death. I shall never forget your agony in the third act of 'Carmen,' at Naples. You will only be miserable."

"I would rather come."

"And a night expedition will be too much for you."

"Why? It is not too much for Mrs. Aintree."

Denison cast a glance at the latter, who was

talking to her son and to Saïd, a brown Egyptian boy, graceful and lithe as a young panther.

"Mrs. Aintree is much stronger than you are," he said. "She is accustomed to shooting. She does more than walk with the guns when she is at home."

"I know," Enid said disdainfully, "she shoots, too. I shouldn't care to do that. I don't think it's womanly. Do you?"

"I don't know what is distinctively womanly and what is not. But I would as soon see a woman bring down a jackal as see her embroider an anti-macassar, that is a crinkly nuisance to the head and a terror to the eye. But that has nothing to do with the matter of your going or not going. Mrs. Aintree is strong and hearty. You are fragile and delicate. I advise you not to come."

Enid stood for a moment in mute hesitation. The ready tears had come into her eyes.

"I might grow strong and hardy too if I did more," she said at length, in a trembling voice.

Denison could not help smiling.

"Fairies cannot bear heavy weights," he said. "You were born to be delicately pretty, not to go shooting jackals. Now I must fetch my gun."

He spoke as if the matter of her going or not going were settled, and she did not venture to

protest. Only when he came out again she whispered to him :

“ I shall not be able to sleep till you come back.”

He kissed her, telling her that she must sleep, and then went down the steps and across the open space in front of the hotel to the road where the donkeys were standing.

Enid watched him and the Aintrees. They mounted. Mrs. Aintree glanced back and waved her hand. The donkey-boys screamed “ Oo-ah ! ” There was a noise of galloping feet on the hard road, and in the moonlight the little cavalcade—looking like inked-paper figures moving over a white tablecloth—passed swiftly across the moon-washed space between the hotel and the Great Pyramid. Then the silent desert took them, and Enid, standing on the veranda, saw only the shivering acacia-trees and the bleak form of the Pyramid, heard only the howling of the pariah dogs. She stared at the trees until she too shivered. Then she gathered her cloak over her white shoulders, sat down in a low chair, and remained motionless. Tears were stealing over her face. She had never before felt so lonely and deserted as she did to-night. And as she sat she thought of her mother comfortably ensconced in the dignified comfort of Grosvenor Square, able to glance from the

curtained windows and rest her eyes upon the respectable railings that hedge the Square garden, able to hear the firm tread of the policeman on his beat, and the comforting roll of the wandering hansom on its way towards Oxford Street or Piccadilly. Poor Enid! this foreign land, drowned in the moon—this country of wide sands and stone mysteries, seemed hateful to her now, desolate, sinister, full of sombre influences and weary deeds. There was something in it that she wanted to struggle against but could not combat, something that had come weirdly through the night, like the Erl King, to steal the thing she loved from her. For, though her woman's mind found the enemy in Mrs. Aintree—at least, in lonely moments such as these—she felt somehow that Egypt was responsible for her misery. She did not definitely tell herself that place influences people, but she saw Mrs. Aintree and her husband drawn together by a shadowy pale hand, boneless, phantom-like, rising from a misty space and from a silence—the pale hand of the desert, the desert that was embodied and moved with them through the moonlight while she sat alone, watching the shivering acacia-trees.

Denison thanked heaven for this—in all the desert there seemed to be never a jackal that night.

Saïd was in despair. He confounded himself in Eastern apology and explanation. His gestures became increasingly dramatic as Guy Aintree's face was seen to grow more and more grim under the moon. He related a thousand tales of jackals. He even spoke of one great and wonderful night when he had hidden behind a rock near the dead body of a camel, and had seen a huge gray wolf steal out of the shadows of the desert, to be shot in the midst of its hideous meal. Insistently he claimed to be believed, swearing by his right eye, and mentioning freely the name of Allah. Guy Aintree only asked him where the devil the jackals were hiding. He had not come out expectant of wolves. Saïd could only accentuate his despair as the night drew on. He could not accomplish the impossible. They rode and paused. They were led to likely places. Once a shadow crossed the moonlight. Aintree raised his gun, fired, and stretched it dead in the sand. Exultantly Saïd hastened forward, his robe floating gracefully out behind his heels. But his triumph was quickly changed to mourning. The lean body of a wandering dog was their only bag. Aintree was inclined to curse and to swear, but his mother made light of their disappointment, chaffed him, and said they would come out another night and have better luck. The boy

would not be pacified, and turned to Denison for sympathy.

"Isn't it an infernal sell?" he said. "Hold up, you brute!" as his donkey stumbled among some loose stones. "Aren't you sick? All this bother for nothing."

"For nothing!" Denison answered, glancing round him. They were right out in the midst of the desert, as a ship may be out in the midst of the sea. The absence of any very definite features in the landscape created a superb white monotony that seemed to Denison own brother to Eternity. When he thought of Eternity he always thought of it as something limitless, flat and ethereally white, with no days and years to stand up in it like forests and mountains, no moments to break it into details. Time would slip into it smoothly and soundlessly, as they seemed to have slipped out into the desert. Why would men for ever seek jackals and carry guns? Here was silence, absence of all motion except their own, and an atmosphere that was sacred in its thin perfection, pure with the purity of a perfect statue, sweet as one note of a nightingale. He felt that had he been quite alone here, he could have been content to lie down in this wide land-ocean and sleep away to death, give his soul to the air and the moon, and let the dust of his body

mingle with the dust of the desert, filter down into the sand, and disperse till no two particles remained together. That would be to become one with Nature, and to become one with Nature would be to live at last.

But Guy insisted on sympathy, and he strove to give it.

"Very provoking," he said; "we can only do the usual, tiresome thing—hope for better luck next time."

The donkeys' heads were turned towards home, and the little beasts carefully picked their way over the rough ground and the perpetual small hills and hollows which give to the desert its aspect of rolling waves. Guy rode on in front with Saïd. Their voices sounded noisily in the night, one angrily arguing and scolding, the other blatant in protestation and false promises and predictions. Instinctively Denison pulled in his donkey to a slower pace. He met Mrs. Aintree's eyes. They looked weary and more unhappy than usual, abstracted too. She was listening to the louder of the two voices, and Denison noticed how lined her face was, and that there were gray streaks here and there in her boldly done hair. As his donkey, obedient to the rein, hung back, she woke out of her painful reverie and looked at him, and then forward to the black figures

that cut the moonlight in front. She, too, tugged at her beast's hard mouth.

"Yes; let them get on," she said in a low voice. And she sighed. "If I could help him to be happy," she added. "If I could help him to do the greatest thing in all the world."

"You mean?"

"To submit."

"I sometimes think that only the feeble can learn that lesson."

"Would it not be truer to say—only the strong?"

"Priests would say so."

"Priests often speak the truth."

"Only one thing speaks the truth," Denison said in a low voice.

"What is that?"

"The thing that never speaks at all. Philosophy, ethics, religion, divinity, purity—you can find them all in silence."

She looked at him with a strange quickening interest. The voices of Guy and of Saïd had died away, and the desert, purged of them, resumed its enigmatic peace.

"But you do not also find submission in silence?" she asked.

"Submission may be one of the world's greatest

sins," he said ; " for it gives the rein to tormentors. It makes slavery, cruelty, all wrong, easy and effortless. I do not find submission in silence. There is nothing conquered in that which makes no sound. No statue, or picture, or scene, submits itself. You may chip it, paint it out, destroy it with a town or a railway, and it merely passes away. It is no longer there. It becomes a memory at once, and has all the tender beauty of a memory for ever. But when a man or an animal submits, he is just as he was, with only an added ugliness, a servility in his demeanour, or a muzzle over his mouth—something about him to rouse contempt."

" Unless he submits to God," she said.

" Possibly that submission may seem beautiful ; but it must, of course, be crowned by a religious belief. If you lack that—and many people lack it—there can be no beautiful submission for you."

" Then life is one long battle ? "

" Or one long indifference."

" I wonder which it is to you ? " she said musingly, and rather as if she were expressing a thought that had often been present in her mind.

" It does not matter much," he answered rather bitterly. " Few things do really matter that men excite themselves about. Indeed, excitement about

anything is regrettable and absurd. I should wish to live in a state of pitiless calm."

Mrs. Aintree looked him full in the face.

"And yet," she said quietly, "I think you are the most excitable man I have ever met."

"Really! You are labouring under a delusion."

"You wish to be a trickster as well!"

He was silent. Nobody had ever been able to read him so rightly as this woman. Yet he did not actively resent her penetration so far as it went. He wondered how far that was.

"You think you understand me very well?" he asked.

"I don't know that I understand you at all. Perhaps I see a little more clearly than your—than most people."

"You were going to say, than my wife."

Mrs. Aintree flushed red in the white moonlight.

"I will not deny it. Forgive the awkward inadvertence," she said frankly.

"And yet Enid boasts that she understands me better than I understand her," said Denison.

"The mistake is natural enough."

There was silence for a moment. Only the soft, quick patter of the donkeys' feet in the sand broke it. Denison gazed mechanically around him at the silver monotony, but, for once, he scarcely heeded

it. His mind was vigorously at work, and served to obscure his sense of sight. The rein hung loosely on his donkey's neck, and even once, when the beast stumbled, he did not tighten it.

"I suppose all mistakes are natural," he said at length. "We are put into this world to make them. We begin as babies, when we believe the back garden to be the world, and the nursery night-light to be the moon. We continue as men and women when we think love can satisfy, and peace be attained by personal effort and accomplishment in one direction or another. Who knows whether we are not making the greatest mistake of all when we dream in old age—of the mind, not necessarily of the body—that death will be release, and the grave rest? And what do our mistakes teach us?"

"Mine have taught me a good deal," said Mrs. Aintree.

"And mine have taught me one thing."

"What is that?"

"They have taught me that articulate humanity is the greatest mistake in all the universe."

"Your assertion is sweeping."

"They have taught me that everything in the scheme of the world is on a higher plane than man, even that man himself can create, can give birth to—things infinitely above him."

"How so?"

"To music that is of heaven. To silences that are beyond all music."

She looked at him rather questioningly.

"I will show one to you," he said, and there was a thrill of feeling in his voice.

During their conversation they had covered much ground in the sand. Now they were already nearing the Mena House. Having reached the top of a little hill, they could see a good distance before them, and Saïd and Guy were visible in the moonlight, riding at a slow pace towards the Great Pyramid.

"You are not in a hurry to be home?" Denison asked.

"No," she answered.

"Then let us make a *détour*."

He turned his donkey to the right, and she followed. They rode in silence towards the Sphinx. At first Mrs. Aintree had no idea what object her companion had in view, and was most completely puzzled. What could be out there in the desolation of the desert? She marvelled silently, until they were quite close to the sandy bed of the Sphinx. Then it flashed upon her. She glanced at her companion. His expression was now supremely unconscious, and she found herself thinking, "I believe

he has forgotten that he is not alone." She had no wish to disturb him, and so they said nothing until they pulled up the donkeys in the sand before the great mystery.

When Egypt lies under the moon in winter, nocturnal expeditions to the Sphinx are quite the fashion. Shouting parties of tourists—screaming as only youth and cockneydom can scream on fine nights—race over the sands to, as the guide-books say, "view" it. And it is accustomed to gaze down on men and women, rowdy with dining, frivolous with wine and cigarettes, idiotic under the baleful spell of a new experience such as conduces so generally to the loss of heads. The practical joke at such times comes into its proper kingdom, and the night is kept awake by a shrill and giggling vivacity that seems peculiar to those engaged in globe-trotting.

To-night the stone face watched a man and a woman, who returned its gigantic gaze in silence, with a gravity bordering upon awe. No laughter broke from them, no banal comments aiming—with a terrible inaccuracy—at the humorous.

When Mrs. Aintree and Denison drew up their donkeys, the latter simply looked at his companion to indicate that he here proved his recent argument to be true.

That silence—the silence of three personalities—was one that might be felt. It lasted a long while. But the silence of the Sphinx was so tremendous, so crushingly powerful, that Mrs. Aintree, who was really an intensely emotional woman, presently found it becoming intolerable to her, like a nightmare. It pulsed, and each pulsation seemed to strike upon her heart with an increasing force. She felt as if it were coiling round her like a great soft serpent embracing her to death. Perhaps the long night expedition had tired her, strong though she was; perhaps her conversation with Denison had excited her unusually. But suddenly she felt as if she were losing all control over her nerves, as if a horror of night and of this stone monster were creeping upon her.

“Say something to me,” she suddenly cried to Denison, with a sharp note in her voice.

“Even you hate silence,” he answered with an effort; “then let us go.”

“No; I don’t hate it.” The coming of sound had braced her; she felt suddenly that she had regained command of herself, and smiled at the trick her nerves had played her. “Let us stay a few minutes longer,” she added. “I asked you to speak because the silence seemed too intense, actually unbearable. Don’t you understand that a thing may

be so impressive as to seem like a danger? If I had not spoken then I must have cried out."

"That is the condition to which incessant cackle has reduced us all," he replied sardonically.

He might have said more, but at this moment voices became audible, and Guy Aintree and Saïd came up at a hand gallop.

Guy immediately burst out in his most reckless manner:

"What the deuce are you two star-gazing for? Saïd guessed you would be here, paying homage to this ugly old beast of a Sphinx."

A sudden wild notion seemed to strike him, and he shouted to a boy who was carrying his gun:

"Here, you—Hassan, or whatever your name is—give me the gun!"

He seized it; cried:

"If I can't pot a jackal, I'll make a bag of something," and aimed at the Sphinx.

As he pulled the trigger a hand knocked the gun up. There was a report. Aintree turned angrily in his saddle.

"What the devil do you mean by that, Denison?" he exclaimed. "Upon my word——"

Denison laid his hand on the boy's arm, but not harshly.

"It is no use to fire small shot at a stone," he

said, "and no fun either. Let us be getting back now."

Guy met his eyes, and something in their expression soothed his sudden anger.

"Well, it was only for a lark," he said. "You know that."

"Of course. Come on."

When they reached the Mena House, Mrs. Aintree went up to bed wondering.

Denison was so strangely unlike other men that she almost began to fear him. Or did she fear for him?

Perhaps she hardly knew.

CHAPTER XIII.

DENISON repented his curious falling away from his accustomed path of reticence—regretted it directly he was alone. He took himself rather bitterly to task for an access of emotional weakness—so he called it—such as he was rarely betrayed into. Boys give out their hearts under the spell of moonlight. That is only natural. But that a reserved man should twaddle about all his inmost feelings to a comparative stranger, merely because the night was fair and bland, was a degradation. As his bedroom door shut upon him, and he saw the mosquito-net, the jugs and basins, his coats hanging on the hooks, his boots standing in a row—all the little details that recall the stale fact that no man can be a hero to his valet or to himself—the spell of the magical night lost its power over Denison.

Romance fled on swiftest wing, and he undressed with the solid conviction present in his mind that he had made a fool of himself. All that was so exquisitely sensitive in him curled up, and his nerves

positively tingled as fancy told him he had revealed far more of his inner man than was in fact the case.

"She must think me mad!" was the bitter conclusion he eventually arrived at. He resolved, almost with a silent violence, to erase the impression from her memory.

Next morning he came from his room encased—as to his mind—in triple armour. Never before had he been more decisively on guard. Every sense seemed on the alert, unnaturally alive and keen. Mrs. Aintree and Guy were already basking in the sun on the veranda. Enid was, of course, writing letters to Grosvenor Square—letters rather plaintive in tone and not at all favourable to Egypt, which was described as increasingly dull, dreary, and improper.

As Denison came out, Guy, who had been leaning back in his low chair, smoking a cigarette, sprang up with a feverish eagerness. He looked frightfully exhausted, but seemed to be on wires, and thrust his arm through Denison's.

"You've got to do something for me to-day," he said, and his voice was thick and hoarse. He cleared it with a tearing impatience, and continued, "to make up for your infernal impertinence in knocking up my gun last night."

"Well, what am I to do?" asked Denison, more hail-fellow-well-met than usual, in order to cover the discomfort he felt on meeting Mrs. Aintree's observant eyes.

"You've got to make a night of it in Cairo."

"My dear fellow——"

"Now, no preaching. I suppose you think you must play the saint before the mater. You don't know her."

Mrs. Aintree looked at Denison, and her glance seemed to say, "Don't refuse him." In reality she said lightly, "Mr. Denison has no need to play either saint or sinner. Every tourist explores Cairo at one time or another. Probably you know the dirty city by heart," she added to Denison.

"I know the mosques," he answered, smiling rather cynically.

"I'll show you something worth fifty mosques!" cried Guy. "Look here!"

He whispered some words into Denison's ear.

Mrs. Aintree appeared not to notice; she occupied herself in moving her chair a little further back so as to be less in the sun. Denison forced himself to laugh, in the proper, improper manner of the seasoned man of the world, at Guy's communication, and the boy, thus encouraged, whispered some yet more ardent details into his ear.

"Ah, old chap!" the boy cried, "I see you're game. You'll come?"

"I will."

Guy gave a shout.

"I knew you were a well-plucked one," he exclaimed. "We'll drive in early, dine at Shepherd's, and then do the town. I'll put you up to everything in no time. I——"

A violent fit of coughing checked his chatter. He sank down into a chair and put his hand to his side.

"It hurts you?" said his mother.

"Like the very devil!"

The cough tore him again. He struggled with it. Denison had the feeling of watching a combat. When it was over, Guy lay back for a moment. The sweat stood on his thin face and his lips worked. There was a screaming terror in his eyes, as if his mind were piteously calling for help. Then he shut them, moved to the action by a vague feeling that they told too much. Denison saw Mrs. Aintree clasp one hand on her dress. The fingers clutched and tore the material, but the expression of her face did not alter. She appeared calm and tranquil. Guy opened his eyes again and sat up.

"That's all settled," he said, making an effort to resume his former vivacity.

"Why not put it off for a day or two?" his mother asked carelessly. "It seems a pity to cram all your expeditions up together. You were out last night."

The boy turned on her almost fiercely.

"No, mother; I'll not put anything off," he said. "Last night was an infernal failure. To-night we'll make up for it. We shall find plenty of jackals to-night."

He burst into a peal of laughter. Denison echoed it with deliberation, plunging himself into imitation of the men he hated. Mrs. Aintree should forget his sentiment, forget that she had ever thought him strange, unlike the rest of the male world. He would be to her as all the other men she knew—eager to run like a dog in the gutter, eager to explore every dung-heap that can be found in a city. Even Guy was rather surprised at the ardour with which his scheme was backed up.

"I didn't know what a rare old sportsman you were," he ejaculated, as they went in to lunch. "You're the right sort to go round the town with, and no mistake. They needn't sit up for us to-night, need they? Ha, ha!"

And again Denison echoed his laughter.

That evening, towards sunset hour, the two women stood on the veranda to see them off. As

they were getting into the carriage, Mrs. Aintree found a chance to whisper to Denison :

"For God's sake keep him as straight as you can! He is desperately weak."

Denison's ear caught the wail of a terrible despair in her voice. He looked into her face. It smiled gaily.

"Women are brave," he thought, as the carriage rattled off.

Enid had noticed Mrs. Aintree's aside. She flushed with anger, and turned hastily into the hotel, leaving the other woman gazing after the retreating carriage. Then she sat down and calculated how many days there were yet to be endured before the steamer started that was to carry them up the Nile. A week had to elapse. She was fully resolved that Harry should not transfer their tickets a second time. But she sobbed quietly to herself as she thought of a whole week more of jealousy and suspicion. How she longed for Grosvenor Square, private views in Bond Street, accustomed things! She felt certain that the sun and air of Egypt had played havoc with her husband's nature, and that, once he was nicely settled in English fog and frost again, he would revert to her as naturally as a pendulum swings back after it has swung forward. Poor Enid! she was for ever attributing emotions

whose meaning she could not grasp to trumpery facts that she could. Her efforts after penetration were indeed a groping in the dark. No wonder that she often bruised herself by coming into contact with those strange foreign bodies which inhabit obscurity.

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As their carriage drove away from Mena House, Denison and Aintree relapsed into silence. Their farewells had been rather noisy, not wholly free from a forced hilarity. Denison undoubtedly had assumed a gaiety which he was very far from feeling. He had acted for Mrs. Aintree's benefit the pitiful *rôle* of a man of the world intent on having a spree. Now he leaned back and wondered whether he had not played his part with a noticeable awkwardness. It suited him so badly. Did she guess that? Guy's silence was owing to another cause. His vivacity was always fitful. His excitement ebbed and flowed, and he was a prey to the most violent extremes. Depression sat always at his elbow, and when he was physically tired he could not attempt to combat it. Just now he gave himself up to reaction, and lay back pale and haggard, his hollow dark eyes fixed, his thin hands lying loosely in his lap, shaken by every jerk of the carriage.

Denison, eternally self-conscious, presently be-

gan to be intensely aware of this sombre silence that drove with them. Its inappropriateness tickled his mind. Two men *en route* to wild dissipation in an Eastern city, unwatched by marching policemen or sober respectable citizens, emancipated, the one from his mother, the other from his wife; their attitude should be expectant, radiantly receptive. Anticipation should perch behind the trotting horses. A demon hope should be their charioteer. Male confidences should flow from one to the other. Stories and jokes should trip from their tongues, gaining body and complexion as they neared Cairo. But this grim silence in which they sat musing, grave and weary from differing causes, was a silence to make a sad philosopher break into laughter. Their midnight progress must be attended with more gaiety, else the dark-eyed Easterns would surely spit upon them for unworthy travellers, scorn them for unnatural humans. Denison resolved that, later, he would force himself deliberately into the correct mood. Nothing should be wanting of gaiety or of imbecility. He would posture to the pipes, coax the chocolate-coloured dancing-girls, chaff the fat, elderly hotel-keepers, smiling with eyes like sloes and wagging their monstrous earrings of gold. The dragomans should think him a fine lordman. The blue-robed beggars

should welcome him to their sinister city of the night as a guest who could appreciate its sordid wonders. For once he would crush the cynic in his soul, he would break up the seat of the scornful, and play the merry Andrew under the stars in the narrow crowded streets. And he would forget for the time the great desert soul that held itself sternly apart from all the grovelling delights of the world and of night—the soul that heard not the beating of the tomtoms, nor the cry of the pipes, nor the crash of the cymbals; that heeded not the nude vagaries of Circassian or Beshareen, of maiden from Nubia or cocotte from France. He would forget the beautiful silence, and plunge himself into the putrid waves of turmoil and of uproar. There was a dance of death whose mazes he must tread. Now to tread them with the pert motion of the dancing-master, the sliding bow, the side step, the necessary grimace! He lashed his mood toward the fish market. Already, beneath the acacias, he saw the naked girls winding sinuous arms and stamping bare feet, brown serpents of the Nile coiling round the willing travellers in their garish homes beyond the flat roofs of ramshackle houses. Already the wail of the music that is full of an antique, gray-tressed age, shadowy with dead faces of embalmed kings, shrill with agonies of forgotten hearts, wan-

dered in his ears with frail footsteps, music of all time that repeats its sad and minor melodies in these Arab bazaars, as it surely repeated them in days of Ali Baba.

The arabeeyah rattled over the great bridge. Denison looked out on the river. The evening light was dying on the water as a child might die on its nurse's breast—dying in a dream of blood. Denison found himself gazing at the changing, swaying red with a curious horror that stole over his body, turning it cold. Out of this dream of blood swept up the chant of sailors on the packed squadrons of Nile boats. Cries and wails of murdered men, he called them. How melancholy seemed their melody, shuddering up from the defiled river! But the horses bore him away from the scarlet stream and from the wild music, and Cairo, with its fleeting figures, its dawning lights, its roll of traffic, its rapid life, flashed upon him.

As they passed the barracks of the British army a bugle rang out. In the square some soldiers, stripped to their shirts and trousers, were playing a scrambling game of football. Guy leaned forward and moved from his lethargy. A light came into his hollow eyes. The great stir of life around them seemed to whip him into a responsive activity. He broke into eager talk, and they arrived before the

famous veranda at Shepherd's no longer silent, but laughing at nothing in particular, and chattering loudly, in a way to attract no curious attention. Their previous grim silence must have been much more noticeable; but they kicked it away from them for the evening, as the shouting soldiers kicked the football. Denison found himself inevitably drawing the comparison as he entered the hall of the hotel, in which groups of people were gathered in evening dress, recounting the adventures of the day, and keeping an attentive ear for the summons to dinner.

Denison and Aintree had a round table to themselves in the restaurant, and the champagne flowed freely. The boy was deliberately screwing himself up to be rowdy. His lassitude needed a sharp tonic, and he did not spare the medicine the obsequious waiter was ever ready to pour out for him. By the time dessert was placed upon the table there was a stain of colour in his thin cheeks, and his conversation was getting loud enough to attract the attention of people sitting at the neighbouring tables. Denison was not sorry to draw him into the hall. They sat down on a sofa close to the door, lit their cigarettes and sipped their coffee. Guy looked at his watch.

"We can go soon," he said. "The fun of the

fair begins early. I wonder if any of these fellows are going ?”

He looked vaguely round over the various men standing about near them. Some of them were officers in uniform. There were a good many Americans, and several English boys. One of the latter was a middy.

“We might make up a party,” Aintree added, “and give the beastly Arabs something to remember. Shall I ask that middy to come with us ?”

“Better not,” said Denison. “Let him get his head broken on his own account if he wants to. I vote we start.”

Aintree burst out laughing.

“You’re in a dence of a hurry, old chap,” he said. “Ah, I was never taken in with all your godly airs. You silent, quiet chaps are always the worst in the long-run.”

He laid one of his thin hands on Denison’s shoulder. Denison had an inclination to strike him and to weep for him at one and the same time. Again he thought of the pictures painted upon the bridge of Lucerne, of the skeleton passing through all the scenes of life, crouching at the altar, rattling moneybags in the market-place, stealing a fleshless arm round dancing women, kissing vanity with dry lips. This boy was a fantastic companion for a

night tour of pleasure. Denison wished to go on it alone with him. Such an expedition would at least have a peculiar flavour of its own. A combination of the tomb and the ball-room seemed in store for them. A lively middy would reduce their progress to a commonplace level. Guy was at least not commonplace.

Denison got up, lighting a fresh cigarette.

"Now to find a dragoman," he said.

"Leave that to me!" exclaimed Guy, darting out into the street.

He returned in two or three minutes.

"I've found our man," he said excitedly. "Let's stick on our coats and be off. I feel up to anything to-night."

When they came out on to the veranda, the moon was low in the sky, and the street was almost silent. At the foot of the steps a few brown figures closely wrapped up, their heads swathed in shawls, were standing—the less aristocratic dragomans who are willing to conduct travellers on nocturnal expeditions.

Many of the regular guides, who throng the pavements before the hotels in the daytime, cannot be induced by any offers of money to go at night with visitors to the low quarters of the city. They will go on their own account to pay homage to their

own dusky divinities, but decline steadfastly to be seen plying their trade by the houris on whom they lavish their earnings.

An arabeeyah was drawn up in the road, waiting. As Denison and Aintree came on to the veranda, from the groups of dragomans a tall figure detached itself, and walked softly towards them. A long brown robe, bound round the waist with an orange-coloured girdle, fell to its feet. From a halo of shawl, that suggested severe toothache, a rascally brown face smiled knowingly, displaying a large mouth full of snow-white tusks.

"This is Hassan Ali," said Guy. "He's the very man for us. I know him, and he knows what we want—don't you, Hassan, you dirty black-guard?"

Hassan bowed like a graceful emperor who knew and loved all the wickedness of the world.

"This is Denison Pasha," the boy went on. "He want see everything—everything, you hear?"

Hassan expressed to Denison his meek and servile intention of showing all that Cairo contained to shock the enterprising investigator. They got into the arabeeyah, Hassan mounting the box beside the driver, whose red fez looked smart and spick and span in contrast to the lumpy shawl which shrouded the dragoman, and made his head an enormous

bulging mass out of all proportion to his body. The whip was cracked; the mechanical "Oo-ah!" was shouted. The lights of Shepherd's died in the night. They drove away from all remembrance of Europe into the Arabian nights, into a strange city of wicked wonders, of fascinating and hateful sights and sounds, of an almost visionary quaintness, a city that was a fairyland, or a nightmare, as the mind chose to take it. The horses trotted softly. The changing lights that pierce the night among abodes of men flashed over the grotesque figures on the box. The moon rose slowly on this new rake's progress of Denison and the pale boy, whose eyes glowed with a sombre fire as the great European shops and the big respectable villas were left behind, and the streets grew narrower and darker. The entrance to the Eastern Inferno was at hand.

Guy gripped Denison's arm.

"Now for larks!" he said in his clouded voice, broken by a fit of coughing brought on by the night air.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE Eastern Inferno is not a vacant place by day, but by night it swarms with happy lost souls, clad in garments of every hue the mind can think of. It is an Inferno of tortuous tiny streets, almost too small to contain a carriage, of small wooden houses that look as insecure as card castles, of strange interiors, of dim, flickering lights, and everlasting hubbub. Movement shifts through it as through an ant-hill. Vice permeates it as dust permeates a house long deserted. Children sprout in its gutters as the green grass in the silent highways of an abandoned city, where Time alone keeps watch, and the gliding hours shiver with the winds, through skeleton buildings and weary, crumbling churches. But here are no churches and no priests. Here the deadly sins—one or two of them, at least—stand unabashed upon the housetops, or move merrily through the streets, claiming attention and regard. In the fish-market of Cairo the fish are many and queer indeed. Had the disciples cast

their net into this sea they would not have toiled all night and taken nothing.

The arabeeyah in which Denison and Aintree were seated turned to the right, and almost instantly silence and respectability were left behind. Moving forward at a walking pace, the horses threaded streets that were merely narrow and filthy alleys, increasingly thronged with people as they proceeded. All the world seemed to be in the highway, and all the world was conversing at the pitch of its voice. Throngs of the lowest natives, barefoot, clad only in fluttering blue robes like loose night-gowns, clustered round the carriage, screaming for backsheesh, and thrusting dirty brown hands forward to receive the expected piastre.

Some youths, less noisy, but equally importunate, clung to the hood of the arabeeyah and murmured information into Denison's ears, telling him in broken English of sights to be seen in this city of deadly night, of marvellous dances that were a show—as Punch and Judy is a show in English towns—of victims for ever bound to the altars of pleasure. And the mouths that whispered smiled sweetly as they told the tales of this Vanity Fair; and the dark, crafty eyes studied the faces of the Englishmen to see when their hearts were stirred, when the mention of some as yet unseen gaiety roused them

from gazing indifference to a new alertness and desire.

This continual murmuring music of the tempters of the streets acted almost like some strange drug upon Denison's senses. Sometimes the soft voices seemed to be actually inside his brain, perpetually reiterating strange details of dances with a chuckling satisfaction; piling description upon description; employing sometimes a wealth of Oriental imagery, at others stating the rudest facts in the simplest language.

It was a strange progress, and its strangeness deepened step by step. The gentle movement of the carriage, the following voices, the wall of brown boys in blue robes, the musical chatter that hung upon the night air, led the footsteps of the visitor into a new world, into an old age. All that was modern passed away.

Through such streets as these surely Morgiana walked. In such streets were sudden murders done—murders that none heeded nor condemned. These brown, lithe people, whispering, tempting, imploring, persuasive in gesture, soft in voice, dirty but dignified, lost to morals, to respectability, yet charming and even childlike—were they not people of another era, long previous to law-giving and law-keeping? As Denison drove, he saw the savagery

of human passions and human desires stand openly at every street corner, proclaiming itself gaily, smiling secrecy away, and bowing reticence out of the social scheme.

When he cast his eyes beyond the human wall that environed the carriage so closely he caught glimpses of men, not of this quarter, like himself in search of sensations. Two Syrian Jews, with flowing ringlets, paused before a ramshackle tenement from which wailing sounds of music issued, and consulted gravely together. One of them took some money from his loose pockets, counted it over solemnly and seemed to hesitate. Then a slow smile broke over his face and was reflected in that of his companion. They turned and entered the house. The game was worth the candle, even to a Jew. A little further on a young Greek, very drunk, was fighting with an English soldier in uniform, in the midst of a scuffling mob of Arabs. The Greek was getting the worst of it. His eyes streamed with blood. Two dancing-girls watched the conflict with a smile so fixed that it might have been painted on their faces. Oaths burst from the lips of the soldier as he battered his victim with scarlet fists.

Aintree sprang upon the seat to observe the encounter better, and laughed hoarsely with a forced

merriment. The carriage jerked and he was nearly thrown down, but some of the Arabs' arms were round him in a moment. He shook them angrily off, and yelled to the coachman to drive more carefully. Then he broke again into a violent fit of coughing which made his narrow chest heave under his overcoat.

Some Albanians stood aside to let the carriage go by. They were smoking cigarettes, and held their stiff white skirts in with their slim hands. One of them fixed his enormous eyes on Denison, and gravely bent in salutation as they passed. Now a great Bedouin, in a rose-coloured robe, pushed his way to the arabeeyah by main force, and begged Denison to leave the carriage and accompany him to a house near by, where he promised to show him wonderful sights. The white teeth glittered in the man's black beard. He had a noble head, like a patriarch, and the gaze of a wild hero. But he spoke only of his wares, and Denison's lips curled.

The carriage turned a corner, and nearly knocked down some semi-nude Bicharis, veritable savages, who screamed and leaped, waving their bare arms frantically and twirling like dervishes.

And now they reached the dancing quarter, and the night was alive with music. As pictures float before the eyes in a whirling zoetrope, lighted inte-

riors glided by in endless succession. These small windowless houses had no desire to conceal anything that took place within them, and every passer-by could see the life they held.

In one a hanging lamp threw a shaft of radiance over the blue-green shutters, and lit up a group of Turks squatting over a game of backgammon for which girls tossed the dice. They played in a veil of smoke rising from huge hubble-bubbles. The girls ran to the door as the arabeeyah went by, and the Turks, remonstrating, dragged them back to resume the dice-throwing.

All the interiors now revealed girls—girls of every colour and complexion, in every attitude and dress. Fair Circassians, their long soft hair glittering with sequins, their pale, dream-like eyes downcast in a deliberate innocence that was not without its attraction, stood before their doors, quietly receptive of any attentions bestowed upon them.

Guy called to them over the heads of the Arabs, and their rosy lips curved in gentle smiles.

In a bigger house than most of the others Denison gained a back view of a Fantasia, that slid across his eyes to a sound of plaintive pipes and soft cymbals that seemed to have been muted. A big bare room, a long divan at the far end on which with curved legs the players squatted, four postur-

ing pale-blue figures with extended arms and brown hands holding wands horizontally, a mass of turbaned men and boys packed together on the right—it went by as a train flashes by at night. The wail of the pipes died away only to be repeated by others in almost every house on either side of the street.

The whole world seemed pulsing with the beaten tomtoms, and the air was alive with the weird voices of antique instruments as a field of clover in summer time is alive with the hum of bees. A white girl cried to them as they passed in a nasal twang. Denison stared at her, and a flush stole into her face. She was an American entangled in this web spun by Eastern spiders; how lonely as she stood laughing in the midst of a troop of Nubian maidens, one of whom had the broad level brows and long luscious eyes of a Cleopatra! Denison found himself shuddering, as Guy exclaimed :

“ An American, by—— ! ”

The continuous shrill music, the everlasting and regular thud of the tomtoms, that came to the ear as the beating of a heart when you listen against a human breast; the eternal hum of the shifting crowd, the illuminated rooms, filled with smiling and posturing girls clad in as many differing bright

colours as a great garden contains in the time of flowers, shifting, shifting by, as beads shift on a breviary—all these things wrapped a veil about Denison's brain, sent him far away. He had a sense of moving through a noisy dream, in which voices called to him which he could not answer, hands clutched him which he could not repulse, delights were offered him which he had no power either to accept or to refuse. It was a maze with no clue, a prismatic hell in which all the demons smiled and seemed to rejoice. But it was nevertheless an uttermost hell. The mouths ever whispering at his side told him that. In every sentence they spoke he heard reiterated again and again :

“This is hell ! This is hell !”

The words shone in letters of fire over each gaping door. They wailed in the pipes, and shivered through the clash of the cymbals. They were inscribed even upon the luminous arch of the sky. Women smiled them. Children lisped them. The hell of a dream, vague, whispering, heaving with bodies of the lost, humming with their cries, their laughter, their imploring, their tears. Even the thin, white face of Guy was a long way off, a sinister mask, hollow and hungry with sorrow and the impatient desires of life ! That, too, was a face of hell.

Two Moorish girls sprang toward the arabeeyah with fantastic gestures. Their sinuous forms were thinly clad in spangled muslin glittering with gold butterflies. Their tiny waists were circled with sashes of pale blue silk that flowed down almost to their little feet. White and red paint plastered their smiling cheeks and lips, and above their impudent eyes the eyebrows were darkened to a coal black, and picked out in a curious pattern that came to a point at the nose. They held their arms straight up on each side of their heads till their gold bracelets gleamed in the light that shot from the houses behind them, and, wriggling their bodies, they broke into a monotonous chant, stamping their toes in the gutter, and revolving slowly, always with the same smile of blatant serenity and encouragement.

Spinning midges they were, circling fretfully over the oozing marshes of the East—insects that knew only the marshes, saw only the slime from which they rose for a moment, to which they gladly sank again. The crowd swallowed them up. But Guy watched their tee-to-tum movements with straining eyes, and parted dry lips, till the gold butterflies, the blue sashes, the bracelets, the nodding heads, were indistinguishable, adrift far off in this sea of humanity. He jerked round on his seat and looked at Denison.

"Isn't it grand?" he said thickly, running his tongue across his lips.

Denison nodded. He felt as if he could not speak. Now they came into a square in the midst of which was a fountain. A number of English and Egyptian soldiers were here, taking part in an uncouth dance with girls and with one another. The pipes and the tomtoms gave the rhythm, and they hopped and plunged, fell on the ground, rolled, swore, and kicked, involved in a tipsy good fellowship, bowed mutually beneath the yoke of melody. Their faces glistened with drink. Their mouths shouted and grinned. Their legs executed the most barbarian antics, and the vivid scarlet of the uniforms wandered through a maze of colours and fabrics as a *leit-motif* wanders through an opera. Some soldiers watched them from the superior heights of donkey-back. Many of these were boys fresh from England, staring with round rustic eyes upon a scene which struck them stupid. The donkey-boys explained and encouraged until they swung off their bedizened beasts, and one by one plunged into the whirl, at first shyly, but soon with an *abandon* in which all traces of self-consciousness were swiftly lost. Young Aintree's eyes shone with excitement. His quivering nerves responded to every wail of weary music, jumped to

every thud of the tomtoms, to every clash of the cymbals. He made involuntary movements in a diminished imitation of the movements of the soldiers and the women. He wagged his dark head, and beat his hand on his knee. His foot stamped softly on the floor of the carriage, and attracted the attention of the dragoman, who shifted round on the box, and darted a servile smirk at him from the shadow of the shawl. He had been the cicerone of the boy before, and had conducted him to the farthest circles of the Inferno. Denison glanced from him to Guy, and then away to the prancing soldiers and women, still vaguely; then once more back to Guy. The boy's excitement was becoming uncontrollable. He half rose in the carriage as if he had formed an intention of mingling with the romping dancers; but the dragoman called in broken English from the box and Guy nodded impatiently. The horses started on again, scattering the crowd. A soldier reeled and fell under their feet, but some big negresses dragged him away, showing their faultless teeth in wide smiles, and gesticulating with their black hands.

The onward movement of the arabeeyah recalled Denison in some degree from his semi-conscious abstraction. He pulled himself together and spoke.

"Where are we going now?" he asked.

Aintree's eyes glittered feverishly.

"To the Hotel de Londres," he replied.

"That does not sound very Eastern. We seem to have left the world of hotels, the world of modern life, and driven into a different age and universe."

"Ah, you don't know it, old chap! It's all right, isn't it, Hassan? Hassan goes there often enough."

Hassan laughed and covered his face more closely with his shawl, making a pretence of shame-facedness.

"There's precious little that's European about it," Guy continued huskily. "Nothing but the name; and it's no more a real hotel than you are. It's a dancing-house. You'll see. Hullo! there's Mohammed! Mohammed, you dirty beast, I've brought a gentleman to see your show. All the dances on hand to-night, eh?"

Mohammed, a tall, sinister youth with only one eye, muttered an eager affirmative, and kept along with them, talking perpetually to Denison across Aintree, and describing in fantastic language the glories of the house to which they were bound. It seemed that he was a decoy, who prowled the streets at night to lure sight-seers to this so-called hotel, in which Guy had already more than once been a

visitor. He was an unsmiling, filthy creature, and his one eye sparkled with intense greed and cunning. Denison made no response to his remarks, and, indeed, could not gather very much meaning from them, as he spoke with excessive rapidity and a fitfully correct pronunciation, gesticulating solemnly with his large and dirty coffee-coloured hands. They drew up at length in a miserably dark and evil-looking alley, in which some pariah dogs were routing and smelling, and their dragoman sprang off the box. The one-eyed Mohammed pushed open the door of a tall, grim house, and invited them to enter.

Once through the door, they were under an archway, and crossing a dark and foul-smelling courtyard, they began to mount some rickety stairs, over which a dim lamp, procured by Mohammed from some secret nook, threw an occasional gleam of light. Guy thrust his arm through Denison's, and leaned heavily upon him as they ascended, breathing hard. He was evidently exhausted, despite his feverish excitement. Another door was pushed open at the top of the stairs, and they emerged upon the flat roof of a house, bounded on one side by a higher building, whose door and whose one lighted window gave upon the roof. Here they paused for a moment, while Mohammed pattered

on his bare feet to the door and rapped on it with his open palm. Guy withdrew his arm from Denison's, and the latter glanced up at the serenely clear sky that presided over Cairo. It was full of intensely bright stars. The round moon climbed in it reluctantly, a circle of burnished silver, throwing a consummate radiance over the square of roof, and whitening the dull yellow glare that stole from the windows of the "Hotel de Londres." As Denison watched its effortless majesty, his thought skimmed along the sky like a swallow, beyond the city, beyond the Nile and the green plain and the mud village, till its wings were stretched over the desert and the desert's deity. He felt the sweet silence, the sweet detachment, as if he knelt for a moment before an altar, and gave up his crowding sorrows to God. The shrieking of the pipes in the town below was the reverend murmur of the organ prompting prayers. And was there not a scent of aspiring incense in the air?

But Guy's laboured breathing stopped, broken by his impatient, weary voice.

"Why the dickens don't they answer?" he cried to Mohammed, whose summons had been in vain, and he darted unsteadily across the roof, and banged with both his clenched fists upon the door.

In a moment it was slightly opened, and a big black face with bulging eyes peeped at them.

"Go on, Sally," cried Guy. "Let us in. I've brought someone to see you to-night."

The face smiled enormously. The door opened wider, and a monstrosously fat African negress was fully disclosed in an attitude of pious welcome. Her woolly head was decorated with a bright red turban, from which coins jingled. Her immense hands were smothered with rings, and her bare arms with bracelets. A richly embroidered Zouave almost cracked with the effort to contain her mighty bust, and her huge flat nose was pierced to receive a heavy gold ornament. Behind her, from under her armpits, two mischievous-looking brown children peeped with smiling eyes, wicked monkeys whose forms were hidden in the shadows of the room beyond. The negress extended her hand to Denison, and the desert died in his imagination. Then she swept from the door, driving the children before her. Denison, Guy, the dragoman, and Mohammed, followed. The door was swiftly shut upon the moon, and Mohammed turned the key in the lock twice.

The extent of the accommodation afforded by the Hotel de Londres was easily gauged. It seemed to consist entirely of three rooms, opening one into

the other. The first, in which the door was set, startled Denison. It was so cheaply French. There was nothing of the East about it. Round the walls ran wide couches covered with yellow rep, on which sat at intervals plump cushions veiled in dingy white antimacassars. A gaudy carpet, on which red roses sprawled and twined conventionally round vases, was spread over the middle of the floor. Looking-glasses in gaudy gilt frames were let into the walls on all four sides of the room, more than doubling its size to the eye. A strong odour of attar of roses hung upon the close air, and a gilt clock ticked noisily under a glass case. On a marble slab beneath one of the mirrors were ranged a number of cards of the hotel, and two or three photographs. The room opening out of this apartment on the right was furnished, that on the left a bare dark place without furniture, but fitted with a divan at the far end and a prayer carpet.

Denison threw himself down on one of the rep-covered couches and lit another cigarette. The peeping children had been driven into the inner room, and could be heard shrilly giggling behind the door. Guy, Mohammed, the dragoman, and the negress, stood in the middle of the room haggling loudly about money. Very softly the far distant wail of the pipes stole in from the dancing

quarter below, and a ray of ethereal moonlight penetrated through the partially-curtained window, and lay across the garish carpet. Mohammed had set down his lamp in the bedroom, but a couple of candles flared on each side of the gilt clock. The question of terms seemed to be a very vexed one, and Denison took no part in its discussion. He lay back and received into his soul a complex impression of the scene and the situation, compounded of many things. The gilt clock, the mirrors, the wavering candles, the yellow rep, the red carpet, the dirty antimacassars, the ray of moonlight on the floor, they made the stage setting. The arguing and protesting quartette in the middle of the room were the cast.

Guy Aintree, pale as ivory, thin, haggard, with emaciated features, shadowy, excited eyes, talking noisily in sentences frequently interrupted by fits of coughing that shook his body. The tall and sinister Mohammed in his pale blue robe, staring greedily with his one eye. Hassan in his brown dress and orange girdle, his head big with shawls. The bulging black negress, nodding, shouting and gesticulating, lifting her ringed hands to heaven, shaking her great head till the sequins that hung from her turban jingled. And the orchestra played an overture through which the ascending keen of the pipes

struck sadly, the hidden children giggled in snatches, while there was ever the ground bass of arguing voices, wrangling on and on about the toll of Hell. The scent of the attar of roses, too, was like the sound of a struck note upon some instrument.

It seemed to Denison that it vibrated upon his ear, completing a horrible, and yet interesting discord, on which followed no resolution. He thought it was like the great discord of life. Would a sweet and satisfying resolution follow upon that? Wearily he longed to know. It seemed to him that merely silence, profound and deep, would be enough—silence prolonging itself, as the desert prolongs itself into quivering distances on every side, melting to soft horizons kissed by clear skies. For a moment an absurd feeling surged up in his heart that he was a man with a gospel to preach—the gospel of the music of silence. The four mouthing faces in the middle of the room were grotesquely hideous. It was the utterance of sound that drew devils' lines on them. In repose each of them must have had some dignity. But who cared for repose?

Denison had a wish to hush these voices, to still the laughter of the furtive children, to go down into the merry-making city, to break the pipes that wailed incessantly on and on, and hush the stamp-

ing feet. He glanced down at the moon ray shivering along the red mass of woven flowers. Just such a ray struck, perhaps, along the face of the great spirit of the desert—the spirit that presided over the noiseless mysteries of the eternal wastes of sand. He longed to be gone from this garish room, with its mirrors reflecting again and again a squalid scene, as men and women reflect again and again each other's tricks, habits, vices, modes of thought and of feeling. He longed intensely to be gone from it all to the novelty of nothingness, as free from details as a dreamless sleep. The abiding scent of the attar of roses sickened him. His nerves shrank from the perpetual sound proceeding monotonously on and on.

The sense of moving in some horrible nightmare, which had oppressed him more than once during the evening, returned upon him again with a more vital force than before, and he was restless under it. His soul shrank and quivered as a bare body quivers expectant of the lash. Suddenly he got up. His intention was to go.

But at that moment in the middle of the floor a bargain was struck. Either the negress or Guy Aintree had given in. Peace with dishonour was declared. The negress hurried into the other room. Hassan sank, cross-legged, on one of the couches

and lit a cigarette. Mohammed drew from a corner a large tomtom, and a thin yellow pipe, his one eye grave with greed. Guy flung himself down by Denison.

"That damned old woman is the biggest do in Cairo!" he exclaimed angrily. "There's no getting round her. We shall have to pay an extra half quid for every blessed dance we see. She makes a nice fortune out of it all. Now, Sally, that won't wash," as a Nubian maiden, elaborately attired in many colours, appeared. "You know what we want."

The negress gave a fat smirk, and pretended to be coy in violent pantomime. But Guy took no notice.

"You won't have a penny till you give us the real thing," he cried. "Make haste about it. Go along!" he added to the Nubian girl, who stood waiting in a sort of mischievously submissive pose. "We won't have all that."

His thin waving hand unsteadily indicated her finery of muslin trousers, bright sash, and embroidered velvet jacket. Mohammed sprang up and pushed her roughly into the inner room. Then he returned, and squatting beside Hassan, took up the pipe, giving the tomtom to the grinning dragoman. Applying his mouth to the pipe, Mohammed drew

from it a weary shriek, and Hassan began to beat the tomtom loudly and monotonously. Sound entered this room, that might have been in Paris, like a harsh person, and filled it with a presence unutterably odious to Denison. He longed to stop his ears, or to tear the instruments of his torture from the hands of those grotesque squatting figures on the yellow sofas. Guy leaned up against him. The boy was trembling with an excitement created in his frail body by the barbaric, and almost tuneless, yet intensely suggestive music.

"You've never seen these Eastern dances?" he said hoarsely.

"No—never," Denison replied.

"Then you're in for a good thing, and don't you forget I said so. You'll thank me for all this tomorrow morning."

His heavy eyes rested on Denison half-inquiringly, half-defiantly.

"You don't look very keen about it," he said rather suspiciously. "Aren't you game, after all?"

Denison's mind shrank away at the words, at the slang of the expression, still more at the slang of feeling that prompted it. But he nodded, and assumed, almost mechanically, an attitude of anticipation, leaning forward, his hands on his knees, his eyes directed towards the door of the bedroom, in which

the noise of giggling and murmuring increased moment by moment.

The boy was satisfied. He was too much excited to be uncomfortably observant. He began to hum to the music and to move his feet, tapping the hideous roses of the carpet in time to the thud and jangle of the tomtom. From time to time he shouted to the negress to make haste, and paused impatiently. The pallor of his face seemed setting towards a curious duskiness of hue, such as may be seen sometimes in a white plate filmed over with dust. His mouth blew clouds of cigarette smoke into the air. On and on the pipes shrieked. Mohammed was indefatigable. His lean brown fingers moved up and down on the little holes. His sinister face was slightly blown out as he poured breath into the yellow tube. And now at last the bedroom door opened wide, and the urging voice of the mother superior became audible.

Guy sat up on the couch, and the Nubian girl glided in, followed by two companions. Her finery was gone, with her trousers, and her costume consisted of a thin spangled robe, bracelets, rings, and beads. As she stood before them motionless for an instant she looked like a statue—a statue with wicked eyes full of expression, of allurements. She was not more than sixteen years old, but in those eyes sat the sins of centuries, laughing at their own blackness.

They rested on Denison and Guy coolly, steadily, while the girl lifted her arms above her head. A slow smile ran over her face, as a pen runs over paper writing wondrous words. A slight, almost imperceptible trembling pulsed in her slim body, rising gradually from heels to head. Behind her her companions, even younger than herself, imitated her with a sort of feverish sympathy; an instinctive seizing on, and reproduction of, her mood of body and of mind. The great negress flopped down upon the couch beside Denison and Guy, smiling from ear to ear. She grabbed the latter's cigarette case, and rifled its contents, uttering a loud chuckle. Striking a match, she, too, puffed like the men, casting absurd amorous glances around her. The trembling that stole through the bodies of the girls increased very gradually, until they wavered like thin flames in a draught of wind. As if the draught grew steadily stronger, these human flames swayed in longer movements. An ever deepening excitement possessed them. The arms began to be drawn softly down and thrust up, first descending to a level with the shoulders; then they were brought forward. The hands fell in front of the smiling faces and nearly touched the eyes, which gleamed through a lattice-work of little brown fingers. Softly and rhythmically the feet began to stamp on the roses of

the carpet, to stamp at each beat of the tomtom, on which Hassan spent a glad energy. The gilt clock did not tick with a more perfect regularity than those six feet upon the woven roses. Denison was conscious of a certain fascination that began to grip him. No that he showed that he felt it, for Guy nudged him suddenly, and smiled, nodding a satisfied head at the dancers.

"Rippers!" came from him in a whisper, and he tapped his hand on Denison's knee in time to the music.

An abandonment began to be apparent in everybody in the room. It swept over them all. The mirrors reflected it, creating by their thrown back reflections an apparent crowd of dancers and lookers-on—a multitude of weird white figures, sinuous arms, smiling evil faces, bodies bending forward in attitudes of eager attention. Tomtoms were beaten in these mirrors, pipes were played, and Denison had a fancy that the sound was multiplied many times in volume by the shining sheets of glass. The noise that crowded his ears could not come from the efforts of those two men full in his view. Things seemed beaten and blown behind his head, all around him, as happens in the darkness of a spiritualistic séance. The air was heavy with noise, thick with a veritable tumult. The dancers swayed more widely. Their

arms moved faster, but always with the same monotonous regularity. It seemed to Denison that the expressions on their faces became increasingly eager. They began to wriggle their limbs, to revolve, to *chasser* slowly and with a smooth and gliding step along the carpet from point to point. The eyes of Guy were bent upon them. His lips parted slowly, and a sigh came from them. A slight patch of ugly red glowed angrily as an active wound in each of his cheeks.

But Denison did not notice this. He took no heed either of the continual flow of conversation poured upon him by the radiant and puffing negress, who was now assuming genial and motherly airs, as she pointed out the special beauties of the varying movements. A spell of monotonous music and monotonous motion was upon him. Certain monotonies build up, by slow but sure degrees, an extraordinary seduction. Like a mason plastering a stone, they smoothly plaster the senses, producing an effect akin to unconsciousness. The monotony of an easy-going sea swims over a man who lies by it in the sun. The monotony of a star-sown night washes round the dreamer who leans out from a window. So this double monotony of sound and motion ran over Denison and drew him down into a world dense and luminous as a world under sea, ever moving, ever

moaning, yet curiously at rest. Long ago and far away everything seemed, even these beatings and melodies in his ears, even these willowy and wandering dances in his eyes. Long ago and far away, full of a faded and *passée* wickedness, and almost infinitely sad. Tears stole into his eyes and sighs fluttered upon his lips. As figures wind through a weary land seeking distant water-springs, these naked girls wound on and on before him. There was a dust about them that slightly veiled their forms, giving to them a dim and shadowy beauty, a ghostly grace. How distant they were at last, floating images in the air, scarcely relieved against a background of clouds, floating, floating—fading—

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A hot hand was laid on his and grasped it tightly, damp and clinging. Hot breath fanned his face. The spell was broken. As when a window is flung up on a marching band, the blare of the trumpets rushes in, the whistle of the pipe and the patter of the tomtom seemed to rush upon Denison's senses with his abrupt return to complete consciousness of all about him. The dancers were close to him, and he was able to note the utter abandonment of their violent movements. All pretence of languor was thrown aside. A complete vigour informed them.

Denison, turning, looked at Guy, whose thin

hand clutched his. But the boy had gripped him unconsciously, prompted to a physical demonstration by the frightful excitement that was waking in him. And as Denison regarded him with a strange, mournful interest, a fit of coughing suddenly tore him. He fell back, pressing his hands to his side. The cough sank in his throat, and a red rush of blood passed from his lips over the garish yellow couch, and dripped to the floor, mingling with the woven red of the roses.

But the musicians played on and the dancers sprang and glided. They, too, were under the spell of the monotony they themselves created. They had lost the power of listening and watching, intent only on being heard and watched. And even Denison sat for a moment gazing stupidly at the white boy lying back with gradually closing eyes, and at the red stream flowing from his mouth. He seemed but a ghastly central figure in a picture, posed, by a master of the art of creating horrors, in the midst of a group of demons.

CHAPTER XV.

THE memory of that night scene in Cairo haunted Denison. He could not by any means banish it, and he grew to regard his ghost curiously as a monitor, a phantom with a lesson to teach, whose continual presence was a sign to him of all he had not even yet learnt. By day and night the pipes wailed softly in his ears, the tomtoms beat upon his brain. The dancing girls in endless lines of half nude figures wound on and on before his inward eyes. Their smiling faces followed him. Their brown hands beckoned to him. They were as charmless sirens singing to him. He would not come to anchor, yet he could not set sail, and leave them to their winds and waters. His mind held him near them, and desire and will revolted in vain.

That evening in the dancing quarter grew more hateful to him each hour. At night he continually recalled every detail of it, from their entry behind the trotting horses into the musical thoroughfares to their bizarre exit, surrounded by confusion, tu-

mult, curiosity and fear. He saw the blood flow down over the yellow sofa and mingle with the red roses. He saw the unconscious dancers set their feet in it, and gaze down startled. He heard their shrill cries, as their brown arms fell to their sides, and they looked like statues upon the white boy from whom the life seemed ebbing. The huge negro rolled off the couch swearing, and the musicians dropped their instruments. Over the floor the tomtom circled, jangling harshly as if it strove to flee with mutterings from the dreary tableau. And still the blood flowed on. Someone moved at last. A key was turned twice in a lock and the door was opened upon the moon. As they raised Guy and carried him out upon the flat roof they seemed to traverse a sheet of shining silver, and the whole world below them was musical in the night.

Then followed the stealthy descent in darkness down the uneven stairs; and as they plunged below Denison looked back. Beyond the roof, by the open door of the Hotel de Londres, bathed in the radiance of the moon, the three girls cowered to watch the procession of their customers. The smiles had ebbed away from their lips and eyes, and awe gave to them the aspects of young children, frightened as by a bogey. A strange inno-

cence had settled over them at this moment, so Denison thought. They were afraid, and they were purified, or was it the moon that washed the lust and evil from their slim beauty, the devilish allurements from their attitude, and shrouded them with a fair whiteness despite themselves?

Stumbling down the steps the little procession crossed the courtyard slowly and emerged into the street. The arabeeyah waited before the archway. On the box sat the coachman, smoking in the midst of the swarming hive of natives, taking little heed of the immoralities that simmered round him, or bubbled up in the tiny streets on every side as water bubbles in a pot set on the fire. As Guy was carried out the cigarette fell from the man's gradually opening lips, and his chocolate-coloured face wrinkled itself in a perplexed concern. People flowed upon them, clamouring for backsheesh, crying of wickednesses to be seen for money, beseeching the beautiful strangers to enter their houses of shame, to yield to their blandishments of lust.

But when they saw the drooping figure lifted into the carriage, blood-stained and flaccid, they gathered nearer in a sudden staring silence. Some of the women touched it, and cried out. They

thought Guy dead, and their painted eyes grew sinister with disappointment. What use was a dead man to them? His cold hands could not give them money, nor his cold lips kiss them. What use was it to dance before glazed eyes or play the pipes to deaf ears? As well posture fantastically before the stone gravings of the temples, or hold out imploring arms to the desert tombs! And from these sinister eyes and set mouths the carriage drove slowly away, still followed by the multitude of the blue-robed curious, pointing fingers, and jabbering with increasing freedom as custom stole the terror from Guy's white mask and supine body.

And they drove on, as it seemed eternally, through the set lines of lighted interiors. From each poured the voices of the pipes, from each thronged the gaudily-dressed dancing-girls intent upon their prey. Denison felt as if some machine were concealed in the carriage, which perpetually and mechanically evoked these women stretching forth arms, smiling, undulating, beckoning, staring surprised as they knew the blood-stained boy, who seemed to yield himself to Hell among them. Then, at last, the streets widened out, the music faded in the night. The horses trotted. The following crowd was distanced. Only the memory of

the Inferno drove with Denison, and haunted him now on the verge of the desert.

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After three days in a Cairo Hotel, Guy had been brought back to Mena House, but the freedom to sin had left him with the power. He could no longer struggle after vice lest he should never know it, or fly at the throat of folly in the effort to kiss her lips. Physical disabilities controlled him perpetually ; no bird tied to its perch dragged at its chain more uselessly than he, a captive in the sunshine posed before the approaching darkness. He was intensely weak, and when he came down, could only rest on the veranda, sunk deep in his chair, watching with hateful eyes the panorama of tourist life unfolded each day at the base of the Pyramid. His mother seldom left him. She never showed prominently that she considered him an invalid, and ministered to him with an assumed carelessness, terribly sedulous in her heart. Gaiety always informed her. There was life in her conversation, the sparkle of champagne in her manner. All the people at Mena House agreed that she was heartless. They sought for the muted strings that play appropriate music to soothe the failing energies of sickness. Hearing a sound tripping as gavottes, they shuddered and recoiled. The whisper

"an unnatural mother" ran round the corridors and the great cool rooms. It was nothing to them that their natural mother would have been a sword to Guy's wound instead of a bandage, and that Mrs. Aintree knew this. They were expectant of certain proceedings under certain circumstances. Disappointed in their expectations, they sought the accustomed refuge of scandal, and talked blatantly of proper feeling and of the most decent and regular attitude in which death should be anticipated by all around the dying.

Enid did not add her voice to the symphony of detraction, but she secretly thought Mrs. Aintree a person outside the pale of propriety, and was eager to be away from her. She did not understand, and so in her heart she condemned. But, indeed, she condemned but weakly, with raised eyebrows, for she was mainly intent upon the coil of her own domestic life. For the moment she had reconciled herself to the now invariable sensation that she was separated by leagues from Harry. What exactly set them thus apart she could not certainly tell. In guesses she named Mrs. Aintree as the cause, and jealousy sometimes flamed hotly within her. Yet sometimes she doubted. He seemed even to her graceful stupidity to move in a world apart, fringed only by the people and things who should naturally

have inhabited the same universe with him, have helped to form its centre, its core. That an increasing abstraction and moodiness settled over him was obvious. Mrs. Aintree found time to observe it, and seek for the cause secretly. But she was too closely bound in one place by her son's side to divine it.

In truth Denison was seized by a strange feeling of desperation, dating definitely from the night in Cairo which had ended so pitifully. It haunted him until it became fixed in his mind—not as a detached scene cut out of life, but as a faithful, if comparatively minute, reproduction of life as it was, and must always be.

The lights of the fish-market, the obscene cries and actions, the incessant tumult set to the wail and the clatter of a music barbaric and painful, were the lights, the obscene cries and actions, the tumult and the wailing notes of life. While he lived must he ever drive on and on through crowded and narrow streets of sensation, watch the monotonous interiors shift by, repulse the intimate phantoms that poured forth upon him, crying their sordid delights and claiming him as their natural and inevitable companion? Could he not escape entirely, as he escaped occasionally, when by night he watched with the great being whom he had learned to love

so insanely, so passionately. An impotent despair seized him, and began to show itself furtively in his manner, in strange fits of abstraction and moments of a mental depression which he was unable to surmount.

The days flitted by and the time pitilessly drew near when it had been arranged that they should go. Their berths were taken. Enid began to talk of packing up with an undisguised relief and cheerfulness. Departure soon seemed in the very air. But Denison did not mean to go. He appeared to acquiesce in the arrangements for farewell, but all the time his mind was unceasingly at work endeavouring to plan out some device that would oblige them to remain.

Sometimes he thought of feigning illness, but he dismissed the idea as impracticable. Enid would be for ever worrying round him, tending him, watching him. He would not be able to go about freely, to escape on those silent expeditions which alone brought repose to his fevered soul—which alone, for a brief time, calmed and assuaged the perpetual excitement of his mind. For although outwardly he still maintained an appearance of almost complete self-control, was often cynical as of old, observant apparently of the foibles and caprices of those around him, he was in reality intensely self-

centred, intensely self-conscious, and ever bracing himself to be on guard.

It seemed to him that by a word, an expression of face, by a movement, the turn of a phrase, he might betray his fantastic secret. Every passing tourist appeared to regard him curiously. Every servant in the hotel wore, to him, the demeanour of one watching. He seldom spoke now without a preternatural deliberation. He weighed each remark before he made it, and considered all the different effects it might conceivably have on any mind as an expression of his own mind. And sometimes he longed for the glorious impotence that was the everlasting dower of the being he worshipped with a fanatical adoration of the brain, and, even now, of the senses. The glory of silence took hold upon him until he could have blasphemously cursed the hidden Power who has given speech to man as one of his highest gifts.

At night, after his return from that desert-hollow where he had kept so many vigils, as he lay awake hour after hour, he traced out all the possible agonies, all the dire tragedies, all the broken friendships, shattered affections, petrified faiths, that cried aloud against the capacity for words possessed by the human creation, until, in his unnatural condition of mind, he believed all the evils that creep like a

cancer over humanity to be due to the power of expression in its highest form.

Tears rose to his eyes as he thought of the holy silence of flowers that can never dispel the romances that gather round them by an unstudied utterance, of the music of the journeying wind that speaks without speaking, and suggests with its voice a thousand tales that it is, by a sweet ordinance, never permitted to tell. He dwelt upon the exquisite calm of the greatest triumphs of art, the solemn patience of pictures, the tender magic of the voiceless statue, that can only look its life, only shadow forth its character in purity of line or feeling of attitude. He dreamed on the silence of the saints in old dim windows of cathedrals, watching generations of worshippers bending breathlessly at their prayers, and going forth chattering into the sunshine to slay their peace of the soul with words. The mystic communion of tree with tree, of twilight with darkness, of land with sea, stirred him to a passionate rapture of despair. Wordless nature he sat upon an altar at which man could only silently worship. Wordless art owed the finest essence of its divinity to the splendid lack which was its greatest possession. He loved silence, and silence was embodied, was made a person, in that couchant lion of the sands, stretched in the immense calm of the desert, surrounded by

the silence of dead ages, ignoring the harsh clamour of present, passing life. He adored the majestic peace of that blurred face. Its gaze gave to him all he desired. He blessed its speechlessness each day, and drowned himself in its embracing soundlessness each night. It spoke to his heart through its huge repression, its immense and gorgeously tragic incapability. Men would call him mad. He did not care. They were mad—mad with the devil's music of words, mad with their puny contempt of peace, mad in that they brushed aside silence, as careless, passing feet brushed aside the dewdrops from the grasses that would keep them.

There was the tragedy of an unrecognised insanity in all the doings of men. He and his great companion knew it and were silent.

He dwelt upon this idea of the beauty of silence, until, by perpetual turning over and over in his mind, it compacted itself into a solid mania. Silence became in his heart a curious religion. In the noisy day he longed with an unutterable yearning for the noiseless night. Whenever he spoke he felt as if he were committing a strange sin against the desert spirit that had never lifted up a voice, that had never degraded itself to the utterance of the slightest sound through thousands upon thousands of years. Each word was a falling away from a

complete perfection at which he aimed with all the ardour of his being. And, in this ardour, he grew by degrees to have an uneasy desire to preach this new and wonderful doctrine of silence.

He pictured to himself the world without words, full of silent men and women, going about their business, going about their pleasure, with a dignity, a calm elevating and uplifting. He trod the streets of silent cities. He watched the children playing silently like the children in a dream. What a peace descended upon the crowded alleys, the swarming slums! All quarrels drowned themselves in that sea of silence, all evil speaking was swept away. The cynic unable to manifest his disease gradually was cured of it. The fool unable to express his folly seemed imperceptibly to learn a solemn wisdom. The lovers were happy as before. When did they ever want cursed words to express the most beautiful thing in life? The old, learned in silence, ceased to fear the last great silence any more, and the sting of death was plucked out of it.

Oh, for a silent world and silent lives in it!

Ought he not to set an example to these mad word-spinners, he asked himself? He hated to have to speak, and Enid began to notice it.

One day she said to him :

"Harry, you are very silent lately. Are you tired of talking to me?"

Her jealousy found its sustenance in every little thing, now that her suspicions were thoroughly aroused.

"People talk too much," he replied evasively and uneasily, for he still had the desire and intention to act normally, though it was growing weaker day by day.

"I think good conversation is one of the greatest pleasures in the world," she said, looking at him wistfully.

He made no answer.

He was, as usual, trying to think of some cogent reason for the continuance of their stay at the Mena House Hotel, but no reason presented itself, and the day fixed for their departure was now very near. As he watched his wife's maid laying her dresses in the long trunks calmly, and with the methodical precision of the accomplished packer, he pressed his lips together and tried to think, to invent some plan.

They would not go. That was certain. But how could he make an excuse for prolonging their already long visit at the eleventh hour?

If Enid were to fall ill!

He was standing by the window of her bedroom when this thought occurred to him. Enid was

taking some pretty things that she had bought in the bazaars out of a drawer and wrapping them carefully in paper preparatory to burying them in a portmanteau. Denison glanced at her furtively.

Her soft cheeks glowed with the delicate clear rose of health. He continued to gaze at her under his eyelids till she looked up. She leaned back from the portmanteau with her hands still full of things.

"Why do you look at me so oddly, Harry?" she asked. "Is there anything wrong with my gown?"

And she threw a feminine critical glance over the front of it, drawing in her rounded chin and peering downwards.

He shook his head without speaking, and this action wakened an expression of fear in his wife's eyes. The perpetual and enduring silence that seemed to be gathering around him was beginning to seriously alarm and sadden her. She fancied, in her jealousy, that she might be gradually becoming hateful to him, that he could not bring himself to address her without an effort. She did not notice that he spoke to nobody unless he was forced to; that even Mrs. Aintree's occasional conversation drew but little response from him.

Enid did not say anything, however, she only

bent over the portmanteau again, and began rustling the paper as she put in her packages.

Denison abruptly left the room. Just outside the door he met Mrs. Aintree. Her face looked white and drawn, and her lips twitched with an obvious nervousness that was painful to see, especially in one usually so calm and apparently cheerful.

"I was just coming to find you," she said to Denison.

"Yes?" he answered rather abruptly.

He longed to be alone. In solitude he hoped to devise some plan that would delay their departure for the Nile.

"Guy is much worse this morning," she said, making an effort to keep her voice natural and steady. "The hemorrhage came on again last night. Dr. Vane says—Dr. Vane——"

Words failed on her lips. She only looked at him. He read in her dilated eyes what they would have been.

"I am very sorry."

He spoke gravely, as if he meant it; but he was conscious that his mind was too self-centred to be swayed by any circumstance that did not directly concern his desires for the future.

"Will you go to him for a few minutes?" Mrs.

Aintree asked. "He wants to see you. He would not care for anyone else."

Denison assented dryly, curiously aware of a complete selfishness that he scarcely wanted to hide. He walked alone to the boy's room, tapped upon the door, and entered.

Guy was not up, and his wasted young figure spoke horribly of the ravages of disease as it lay in the white bed, only vaguely defined beneath the quilt. His head was low in the pillows, and his eyes were turned towards the opening door. When Denison came in he nodded, trying to assume a manly, careless air.

"Well, old chap," he said, and there was an apologetic note in his husky voice; "I felt a bit tired this morning, so I wouldn't get up. I always was a lazy beggar."

His glittering eyes met Denison's. They were full of an observant anxiety, watching his face in search of any horror or pity that would have been a confession. But Denison showed neither. He sat down by the bed and entered into conversation. All the time he talked he felt with increasing certainty that Guy was dying—slipping away down the slope into silence. There was a strange, new look in the boy's face, a strange tone in his voice, both strongly unnatural and arresting. His long

hands were clenched outside the counterpane, while he strove to talk.

Denison, looking at them, saw them the hands of one already dead and past from recollection, and a sense of envy overtook him. All that he longed for this boy would soon possess—at least, it seemed that it would be so. Silence, detachment from the prancing follies and pitiful, distracting voices, liberation from the cage in which humanity steadily revolves, emulating the squirrel. He sat on by the bed. Almost unconsciously he had ceased from talking. Guy lay back breathing rather heavily. The silence lasted a long while. Denison's eyes were bent with a keen scrutiny upon this vanishing figure, dwindling down to death in the hot sunshine of Egypt, dwindling down to darkness in the radiant light, and he was horribly envious, and jealous and curious, too. He seemed to himself observant of a departure from a weary land in which he was forced to remain. Guy's condition was surely a blessed one. A dreadful, foolish impulse came upon him to lay his hand lightly on those clenched hands pressed upon the counterpane, and say, "I congratulate you!"

He actually stretched his hand out.

"What is it?" Guy asked. "You are going?"

Denison leaned over and looked at him in the eyes.

"Why are you so desperate?" he said, with cruel scrutiny. "What are you afraid of?"

The boy stared back at him.

"Who said I was afraid?" he said, in the tone of a schoolboy, summoning all his pluck.

"You are afraid," Denison said.

"No—I tell you no; and if I am, what of?"

"Don't you know?"

The boy's dry lips began to work and flutter tragically.

"You beast! you devil!" he muttered, choking down a sob. He lifted up his hands as if to strike Denison. "What do you mean?" he gasped, a piteous apprehension dawning over him as he lay.

A cruel pleasure in the situation took hold of Denison.

"Why are you afraid of dying?" he said coldly.

Guy trembled all over till the bed shook in the sunshine.

"What rot are you talking? What the devil are you gassing about?" he whispered fiercely.

The fury of terror in his eyes fascinated Denison as he leant on the bed.

"You are dying," he said.

The boy cried out with an oath, denying it.

Denison only smiled. It seemed to him such a queer comedy, this struggle against the beautiful. He bent still lower, and put his hands on the boy's thin, sharp shoulders, pressing them there.

"I envy you," he said slowly. "You are getting out of it all."

As he stared down at Guy the boy uttered a shuddering cry and broke into a passion of helpless, childish tears.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was the night before the day fixed for the Denisons' departure. Enid had gone up to bed happily. She felt that she was on the eve of dropping a load of troubles from her shoulders. Her heart bounded as she kissed her husband affectionately and bade him good-night. But she said nothing of the joy that moved her so sweetly. He watched her pretty white dress vanish up the staircase, pressing his lips together. There was an evil look in his face. Had Enid glanced back she must have noticed it. But she went her way to bed smiling to herself, eager for the sleep that would hasten the coming of the morning.

Denison returned to the veranda and joined Mrs. Aintree there. Guy had fallen asleep upstairs. He was failing fast, and now was often drowsy after nightfall, dropping into slumber as if from sheer weakness and lack of will to speak or to think.

"Mr. Denison," said Mrs. Aintree, as he sat

down beside her, "I thought I should have been very sorry at your going to-morrow."

"You mean that you are not?" he asked.

"How can I be now? What have you been doing to Guy?"

"I have done nothing. I scarcely understand you."

"I cannot understand. This evening he told me that—that he—hated you—you whom he always sought. Why is it?"

Denison was lighting a cigarette. A tiny glow of living fire illuminated his face. He extinguished the match, dropped it to the ground and set his foot upon it.

"I think it is because I departed from custom with him the other day and told him truth. People can seldom bear that."

"What truth, then?"

"Can you bear it either?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered quietly.

"I think so. I told him that I envied him because he was dying."

Mrs. Aintree did not speak for a moment. Her eyes looked out to the dim and brooding night.

"That is truth. I do envy him."

"He is dying. I know it," the mother said, without any display of feeling, any tremor or sigh.

"Perhaps he might have lived if—if—ah, why does boy nature love so the knowledge of evil? What has Guy's horrible life here brought to him? I have done wrong in not being as other mothers perhaps, in not protesting—exercising authority—and yet—I shall never know. If I had to live the days over again could I act differently?"

"It would have been useless if you had. Human battle against human nature in another is an absurd forlorn hope."

"No, no; but I loved too dearly to fight. I have been terribly weak."

"Love makes for weakness in us often."

"It must be a wrong sort of love, then, I suppose."

"And to act strongly, or to speak out one's mind is a sowing of dragon's teeth to raise one up enemies. Guy hates me because I was myself. I told him what I really felt. You would hate me if you knew me, or you would merely fear me, as Guy fears death. I have always found it so since I have thought at all, or observed at all. The first law we should lay to heart when we begin to live is this—never be natural. Only the unnatural are trusted, only the false are loved."

He spoke bitterly. She shook her head.

"You don't believe what you are saying," she

said. "You are being false. Guy does not hate you because you told him the truth only, but because, by doing so, you made him horribly afraid. If I could only give him courage!"

"He will not need it long."

"Religion is such a grand armour in which to meet death," she continued. "Why do so few men don it?"

"We have an instinct that guides us to suffering and teaches us to avoid all that will banish or allay it. We throw ourselves upon the bayonets. We live as if we fancied ourselves eternal, and the inevitable astonishes us far more than the unexpected. I do not pretend to understand why it is so—I do not pretend to understand myself. But, at least, I shall never learn to fear death."

"And yet you are a coward."

"Why?"

"Because you fear life."

Denison did not answer.

"That is not natural," she said.

"It seems to me as natural as the other."

She was silent. When they parted she said:

"To-morrow it will be good-bye."

She noticed that he only repeated his good-night without allusion to her remark.

But he went up to bed smiling as he considered it.

Long after midnight Enid awoke to a horror. A voice pierced through her dreams crying:

“Help, help!”

It reiterated the exclamation, grew louder till it forced her into complete consciousness. The room was dark. She sat up in her bed. The voice was her husband's, and sounded just outside her door. She sprang up in the blackness, found the door slightly and unaccountably open, rushed forth, fell over something and lay helpless on the floor of the corridor. Simultaneously there was a noise and a movement on all sides. The hotel was roused. People in various stages of undress came from their rooms, some with lights. They found Mrs. Denison prostrate with a twisted ankle, and a large, heavy tin can rolled over on its side. Denison's door was shut, and no noise issued from his room. One or two kind women came to lift Mrs. Denison up, but she cried:

“My husband! My husband! Go to him! He is calling——”

An Arab in a white robe struck on his door, and after the blow had been several times repeated,

Denison's voice, in a sleepy, heavy tone, answered :
"What is it? Come in."

The Arab entered and found him in bed, evidently just wakened up and rubbing his eyes vaguely. When he learned of his wife's escapade, he got up immediately and went to her. People had returned to their rooms by this time. Mrs. Denison's maid was bathing her ankle, and Denison, sitting down by the bed, exclaimed :

"What has happened? Were you walking in your sleep, Enid? What is all this? You are hurt?"

"Yes, my ankle! But, Harry, why did you scream for help?"

He gazed at her with extreme surprise.

"Are you dreaming?" he said. "I was asleep—sound asleep."

"But I heard you," she persisted. "You woke me. That is why I rushed out and hurt myself. You called again and again just outside my door—and other people heard cries."

"They must have heard yours, then. Dear child, you have had the nightmare."

He bent over her foot.

"Are you in great pain?" he asked with an unusual tenderness.

"Yes. It is sprained. I shall have to see the

doctor, I suppose, to-morrow. Oh, and to-morrow we are going."

"If you can travel," Denison said doubtfully.

A sudden strange look came into his wife's face. She flushed deeply, stared at him with a hard, almost hungry violence, then glanced at the maid, who continued mechanically to dip the sponge in the basin and squeeze the water out over her mistress's foot.

She opened her lips as if to speak, then closed them again. At last, lying back on the pillow, she said quietly and in a low voice :

"I will be well enough."

"We shall see," replied her husband, casting another glance of keen compassion upon her.

The doctor's verdict impressed upon Mrs. Denison the absolute necessity of keeping quiet for at least a week, and, with a burst of childish tears, she flung herself back on the sofa as he left the room. She was bitterly jealous now, and a horrible suspicion had forced itself into her mind. She believed that her husband had descended to a base and brutal trick in order to prolong their stay at the hotel. She felt certain of it. His ruse of the previous night had succeeded to perfection. He might have maimed her. He did not care so long as she was a prisoner and he was free to disappear

with Mrs. Aintree to the golf-links in the plain or to the wastes of the desert. She buried her little dark head in the cushions and sobbed as if her heart would break. The pain in her ankle was acute, but that was as nothing to the agony in her mind. There was something so appallingly cold-blooded, so calmly sinister about the transaction of the night; and the theatrical demonstration of sympathy—so she called it to herself—that followed its complete success. She shuddered. She was dazed. How infatuated with passion her husband must be to change so radically, so suddenly, in nature. She sobbed and sobbed her very heart out. For it must be passion, and Mrs. Aintree must be the object of it. Looking round in search of a reason for Denison's conduct, Enid could see but one—this mother of a dying son. It was true that her suspicions roused so long before had not found very much to feed upon. When Denison and Mrs. Aintree were together—and Enid watched them—even her anxious eyes detected little that was lover-like in their behaviour. But there had been moments, there had been incidents, which assisted her to arrive at a conviction that her now active jealousy was well founded. Denison's detected absence from his room at night, his presence with Mrs. Aintree in the corridor, long after the other had vanished on

the pretext of fatigue, his practical refusal to allow his wife to join the jackal-shooting expedition—all these things, and others of slighter import, came to Enid's memory, and walked there with feet of fire. Would there be no escape from this prison in the sand until Mrs. Aintree gave the signal for departure by leaving it? Enid, having now fully made up her mind to believe the worst, cast reason to the winds and allowed a free passage through her whole nature to naked jealousy. It mattered not that Mrs. Aintree's time seemed fully taken up with attendance on her son. It mattered not that Denison seemed to care little now for her society or for the society of any living creature. Enid felt that she was plunged in an atmosphere foggy with subterfuge, and as she feebly wept, she strove to find weapons of attack. Desperation seized her. Her husband had taken the field against her, but she had little idea of meeting his cowardice with reprisals. Woman usually prefers to fight woman. Enid's flood of bitterness flowed round Mrs. Aintree.

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It was true: Denison, driven out of his real nature by the stress of the strange passion that had taken possession of his soul, had deliberately planned the accident to his wife. In the night he had de-

vised it and carried it out. He knew it to be a clumsy school-boy plot, a sort of booby trap, a dastardly, contemptible action. He did not care. It was a chance and it succeeded. All he did care about was to gain time, to stave off the moment of departure. He could not go on the morrow. He could not leave the mystery he loved. The controlling power that all sane persons possess, and that constantly holds them back from a thousand follies—follies born in their minds to die there without attaining the adult stage from which immediate action results—had deserted him. He was powerless to direct his course, powerless to stay the stealthy flood of desire that had for days, for weeks, been creeping up and up over his senses, until brain, heart, and soul, were drowned in its turbulent waters. All his reasoning power was now devoted to one object—the devising of fresh plans to prolong his stay near the Sphinx. The accident that had happened to Enid would only keep her a prisoner for a week. The doctor had said so. What was to be done then? He did not actively consider, for the practical was at all times unattractive to his mind, and more especially so in his present condition. And he was a haunted man, haunted by a memory that continually recurred—the memory of the night progress through Cairo, which had ended in Guy Aintree's

ghastly fit of illness. The wearily dancing horrors of life moved to the pipes that wailed in the dancing quarter. The lighted interiors repeating themselves, as the carriage met them in its onward progress, imitated, by virtue of their sameness, the interiors each man peeps into as he wanders down the years. And from each, Denison told himself, come dancing-girls, alike in allurements, in greed, in impotence, to grant any lasting joy, painted and tired, tricked out in a jingling finery, that, removed, leaves behind it a degraded nudity.

Always a pessimist by temperament, always a constitutional cynic, as another man may be a constitutional consumptive, Denison seemed in Egypt to have reached the end of his tether, the limits of his powers of passive endurance. His declaration of envy of Guy was not a pose. It was tragically real. For Guy was going down into silence, was passing out of the dancing quarter, away from the posturing figures and the minor music. Denison thought that, by his death, the boy would attain to a strange proximity with the great silence which symbolized all that was opposed to the follies human beings loved and fought for. Guy, who cared nothing and feared everything like a child who fears the darkness, was selected by the hidden Power who drives the chariot of life and time as

the chosen captive of death, and Denison was contemptuously passed over and left, hating all that Guy loved. Those who want to die live. The desire defeats its accomplishment. Denison brooded on all this while Enid lay in her bed, or on the sofa, imagining him wrapped up in the vulgar concerns of a passionate intrigue. And Mrs. Aintree ministered to her dying son, who was a prey to nameless terrors, but strove to mask his mental agony with an assumption of defiance that was infinitely pathetic.

And beyond this play of emotion, passions, despairs, beyond this desire for death, this longing for life, lay the calm image hewn by men, yet greater than men, watching far-off things; waiting for unimagined events, aloof in a strength that drew the homage of the wondering world, and heeded it not at all.

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Despite the turmoil of her mind, Enid's health improved. The foot was better; the swelling began to subside. Roses glowed once more in the soft cheeks that had been so pale. Denison watched this return to convalescence with a benumbing horror. He seldom spoke now, and had ceased to exercise a continual watchfulness over his manner. More than one new arrival at the hotel began to

comment on the strangeness of his demeanour and on the rapt abstraction of his eyes. Enid could not come downstairs. Mrs. Aintree was almost always with Guy, and in consequence Denison sat alone at dinner. When his neighbours attempted politely and tentatively to arrive at a conversation with him they were met with an almost impenetrable silence. One of them, however, persevered, and Denison from that day retreated to a small table placed in the raised part of the huge dining-room, and dined apart from his kind. He now began to brood perpetually on silence, and it was with some difficulty that he had prevented himself from making a violent demonstration against the talkative stranger who had ventured to address him.

During the brief moments of intercourse that Mrs. Aintree had with him from time to time she did not fail to note the peculiarity that had stolen over him, the strange expression of his melancholy eyes, and his elaborately reserved manner. She felt that his apparently intense coldness was backed by the fiercest excitement. Flames gleamed through the transparent wall of ice. As she sat by the bedside of Guy, in moments when he slept, leaning like a white shadow on his pillows, she wondered to what Denison was drifting. The real cause of his excitement she could not divine; she

imagined only a general mental condition which had been gradually approaching, perhaps through many years, which founded itself upon, took its rise from, many causes, some of them almost inconceivably minute.

Speech began to seem to Denison now a sort of deliberate crime, a sin against that mighty creation of dumbness on which he waited by night and day as a slave waits on the bidding of his master. For in the glare of the Egyptian sun he was at this time perpetually to be seen moving about over the sands with an elaborately desultory air, and slow, hovering footsteps. The Arabs, knowing that he was staying at Mena House, ceased to worry him, reserving their attentions for the flying tourists who came to the Pyramids on the wing, poised themselves an hour or two under their shadows, and flitted away before evening fell. When a flock of sight-seers appeared, fluttering guide-books and full of questions, Denison strolled on as if taking a quiet walk. On their departure in a cloud of sand, he stealthily returned and resumed his wandering near the being who enthralled him.

It was a strange mania that had hold upon him, but no one suspected it. Enid's fears ran in another direction. Denison only paid occasional and brief visits to the room that was her prison.

During his long absences she was racked with absurd suspicions. Sometimes she meditated daring all things, summoning her courage and appealing boldly to Mrs. Aintree. But Enid's courage refused to come at her call. She procrastinated feebly, and ended by giving herself up to silent, lonely weeping. And her husband's extraordinary silences when he did come to see her alarmed and puzzled her. She could not account for them, and began to tremble, and wonder if they had their root in a growing hatred of Denison for herself. When he sat by her she scarcely dared to speak to him, or even to look at him. When he came he brought fear with him.

As the seven days slipped by a ghastly pallor overspread Denison's face, and a hungry anxiety was born and increased in his eyes. He hated Enid more and more as he observed her gradual complete return to her normal condition of health. He permitted her to fix the day of their departure, and she never noticed the furtive glance of immeasurable anger that he cast at her from under his drooping eyelids as she did so. Despite his perpetual brooding over the matter, he had not been able to hit upon another plan for postponing the tragedy of his farewell with the desert spirit he madly worshipped.

And so the last evening fell upon him, and found him unprepared, perplexed. Enid was well enough to come down. She dined with him at the small table he had taken possession of, and now, when she saw him once more with other people near him, and could compare, on the spot, his demeanour with theirs, she was forcibly struck by the unnatural, stony gravity of it, and by the dead palor of his face.

She had put on her prettiest gown to do honour to the occasion which ought surely to be a little festival. So she had humbly thought, as her maid decked out her dainty slight figure and arranged her beautiful hair. The invalid who comes down for the first time is full of a pleasant human sense of triumph.

Enid had smiled to the reflection in her mirror—a sweet, gentle girl in white with wistful eyes that wanted to be welcomed. But there was no smile in her eyes as she joined her husband in the dining-room. One glance at him banished any trembling hope of peace. She suddenly felt horribly unsafe with him. During her days of retreat she had, amid all her jealousies, striven persistently to kill one—the worst—of her suspicions. She had even grasped at and held a certain strength of mind to assist her in the attempt. She would not allow

herself to believe permanently that Harry could have contrived her piteous paltry accident. Day after day she told herself that in fancying that she had gone too far. He might be false, but he could not be physically cruel, and by reiterating this process of mind, she had almost succeeded in putting the horrible idea from her.

Now, as she glanced across the table at Denison, it returned ; it leaped upon her. What if, as he sat there, he was turning over in his mind some fresh, unspeakable plan of delay. The little wife shuddered in her pretty gown, her pathetic festival attire. Could it be possible ? Could she have married—more, have loved and trusted a fiend ?

She strove to talk naturally and cheerfully, but Denison made no reply. The prolonged silence that he maintained began to really terrify her, and she was afraid to intrude upon it, even to ask him if he were ill. So she ceased to speak, and felt as if she could hardly eat. If she clattered her fork against her plate, or jingled one glass against another, Denison looked at her with a grim and sinister rebuke in his eyes. And once, when in her nervousness she dropped something on the uncarpeted floor, she saw him suddenly bring his hands together, each grasping the other tightly, as if to

hold it back from the performance of some violent action.

As they left the dining-room after dinner, Mrs. Aintree was passing through the hall. She stopped to speak to them, but Enid hurried away with a sort of frightened rudeness. The other woman was too obviously preoccupied to notice or resent it. Denison stood coldly to listen to her.

"Guy is much worse," she said. "It is possible that he—that he will not live through the night."

Weary and abstracted in her grief though she was, she noticed an expression of anger cross Denison's face. What could possibly be the cause of it? He stood staring at her without speaking. At last he said with apparent effort:

"And he wishes to live!"

A smile hovered on his lips, and he turned away abruptly. Mrs. Aintree went upstairs wondering. She had scarcely disappeared, before Enid came from the public drawing-room.

"Good-night, Harry," she said nervously; "I am tired; I shall go to bed."

He nodded. Enid sat down when she reached her bedroom and burst into tears. Terror overmastered her. What could be the matter? Had she become utterly hateful to her husband? She began to look forward to their Nile trip with appre-

hension, instead of with joy. Before she got into bed, with a white face, she crept to her door and locked it. She was afraid—horribly afraid.

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Meanwhile Denison was on the veranda of the hotel alone. He had walked out mechanically with his cigar-case in his hand, following the example of several men, who were chatting and chaffing gaily, emulating each other in the relation of tales suitable to the sacred and holy after-dinner hour. These gathered together in a group, bending discreetly forward, lest their war of wit and wisdom should be heard afar. Denison sat down at as great a distance from them as possible. He still held his cigar-case, but he forgot to smoke. He was preparing himself for an ordeal, for a parting.

It was no longer a season of moonlight. The night was dim, though full of stars, and the wind was warm and gentle, and impregnated with the fragrance of the green Nile land. It whispered and sighed in the sentinel acacia-trees that stretched away in rigid lines from the verge of the desert towards the minarets of Cairo. It sounded in the leaves like the voice of one weeping, Denison thought. He listened to it breathlessly, trying to think a human despair into its vague and furtive

utterance that rose and died waveringly, as if suppressing itself in fear of an unsympathetic listener. Mechanically he sat there until he seemed thoroughly and closely at one with the night, with its ethereal half light, its mystery, its suggestive dumbness. His head was bent low, and his eyes gazed straight before him to the white road that wound to the great Pyramid. His mind sank gradually into one of those waking dreams that overtake the thoughtful or the unhappy in moments of deep silence, in the warmth of a tender twilight, in the shadow of the calm darkness.

A riddle! His whole life was that, and so was the most commonplace life of the most commonplace man. His life was only, in its many phases, a repetition—with some slight alterations, perhaps—of a thousand other lives that had run their course; been lighted by an unseen hand, and extinguished when their faint illumination was no longer necessary to the world. Denison was suddenly seized by a fierce unreasoning anger as he dwelt upon this thought of repetition that had come to him. To merely reproduce in mind and in deeds the minds and deeds of dead people, to vary in no respect from the previous procedure of thousands, to tread the same path as they had trodden, and cease to tread it as they had ceased—this angered

him fiercely. The endless repetition of existence sickened him.

He listened, and heard, from the group of men, the murmur of a deep voice. He saw the listeners draw a little closer together, till the circle contracted. The voice grew louder, paused a moment, uttered an emphatic word or two and ceased, drowned in a burst of appreciative laughter, succeeded by a general buzz of comment and of elucidation. A man's funny story, Denison thought, as told at this moment in a hundred hotels in a dozen countries—a story with a soupçon of schoolboy impropriety to spice it! All the years of his life, in clubs, in smoking-rooms, at bars, on the race-course, wherever men meet, he had seen the same farcical comedy enacted, the same expression of slightly prurient anticipation flicker into the eyes of the hearers, the same release of tightened muscles as the story-teller was delivered of his tainted joke.

The endless repetition of life, how it brushes all freshness from the soul! He longed to be different from those he knew in act as he was different from so many of them in thought.

He got up quietly, descended the steps of the veranda and made his way out into the road. Once there, he instinctively turned towards the desert.

He was going to say a farewell, in silence, in the

privacy of the night. Walking on with an even step, he quickly came out upon the arid stoney ground on which the Great Pyramid stands, and as he did so a new wind met him abruptly, a wind pure, keen, intensely dry—the wind of the wastes, that wanders to and fro over the monotonous sands for ever.

It seemed to accompany him as he walked, to whisper that it knew his silent intention, to fly on before him and give notice of his coming. His footsteps, stirring the loose small stones, created a thin grating noise in the silence.

He hated them for that. He desired utter soundlessness.

In the distance the pariah dogs barked monotonously on the hard mud walls of the village in the plain. If someone would only strangle their howling voices in their lean throats!

“Down there, outside the hotel,” he thought, “those men are still in the veranda telling their stories, each one trying to emulate the other, to be a little more coarse, to introduce a stronger strain of witless impropriety into his narrative. And inside the house the women are gathered, whispering the latest hotel scandal, and being occasionally interrupted by the squalling of some inept, modern ballad. And so it has gone on night after night

for years, and will go on for years to come. What must the beautiful silent things think of us? And we can enjoy our monotony of life; we can find worth and even excitement in it. How strange! We are greatest, after all, when we are sleeping."

He walked on furtively until he neared the hollow in which the Sphinx crouches. It was early in the night, and once or twice he saw in the darkness the gliding form of a robed Arab stealing away into the vague shadows, like a ghost seen in a dream. And at length he paused, as the sand sank abruptly down before him, and the dim outline of the huge, weary figure, that the night only partially revealed, met his eyes.

To-morrow he was going away from this mighty spirit of power and of silence into the noise and the recurrent chatter of the world.

Could he go?

His brows contracted above his morose eyes. His features were gray and drawn like the features of a dying man. In his heart there was a keener agony than the agony of a lover parting from the woman whose breathing form and mobile, expressive face he worships. Yet no tears came to his eyes. There was a solemnity in his mind that kept them back. Tears are for those that speak, not for those that are silent.

Away there in the hotel, Enid, shut close in a narrow room, shrouded in a white cage with yielding walls, was sleeping. In a few hours she would wake, would spring up eagerly, would immerse herself in the fussy pleasures of departure. They would drive into Cairo through the crowd of screaming Egyptians, hustling among the laden camels, the marching English soldiers, the gay riders bound for the race-course. The wealthy Turks, perched in Victorias behind their magnificent Russian horses, would dash by them. The beggars would dart importunately at their side clamouring for money. At the corner, by the café, as you turn over the bridge, the groups of brightly clad Saïs would be standing discussing the demerits of their masters. On the broad river the swarming boats would jostle each other, black with people herded together like cattle. The bugles would yell from the barracks of the army of occupation. Amid a clash of arms and a clatter of galloping horses the Khedive would drive past from Koubbeh. Cook's tourists would be making in crowds for the landing-stage on the waste ground behind the British Agency. The sunshine of the morning would be full of uproar.

Could he go ?

And then a fierce, unreasoning anger against Guy took hold of him. He hated him because he

was dying, fading even now in this beautiful night. To lose one's grip on life, how can that be terrible? To lose one's grip on time, how can that be a tragedy? Time is but a spar in the sea of eternity. If you cling to it passionately you drift on, companioned by an everlasting apprehension. But if you loose your hold on it, you sink into the delicate embrace of the great sea, and fade, through sea changes, into rest. Denison, as he thought of Guy, felt like a man running a race who sees his rival draw slowly ahead of him.

He was shaken by a passion of anger.

Could he go?

He stood there alone in the beautiful, peaceful desert, listening to the silence for a long time, until his ear seemed to catch the faint, regular sigh of a deep breathing.

He trembled. A strange thought had come into his mind.

It seemed to him as if, at this moment of farewell, the soul that he alone was in sympathy with longed to give itself out to him with an articulate voice, or to call upon him, in need of something.

Of what?

Perhaps in its majestic loneliness his worship had wakened a regret. All animate creation seeks some

sympathy from someone, some reciprocity, however slight. Why not inanimate creation also?

Was not this great spirit of the sands and the old years striving to whisper to him its secret? Could he leave it to face the vacancy of the coming ages? Was he not part of it, at one with it in mind, and so become one of the limbs of its soul?

He shuddered. He feared lest it would find a voice, and so lower itself to the level of articulate things.

But as he listened, the faint sound of the breathing ceased.

The pariah dogs barked.

There was no other noise in the night.

Silence! He wished to immerse himself in the silence of the being he loved.

He could not leave it on the morrow.

Suddenly he stole down the steep side of the hollow with a quickening step. He rushed through the darkness, and, in silence, he dashed himself, with arms stretched out, as if in an embrace, against the mighty rock that has defied the perpetual intangible embrace of the gliding ages.

CHAPTER XVII.

THAT night Enid could not sleep. She was too sad and too frightened. All sense of stability had left her. She lay trembling and wondering, numberless melancholy thoughts and suspicions stealing through her mind.

She listened steadfastly for her husband's footsteps as midnight drew near. It passed, and they did not come. Then again jealousy rushed to the front. Where was he? She longed to know. One o'clock struck, and two. Still Enid tossed wearily about on her pillows, coming gradually to a resolution unusually bold and decisive. Presently she got up and began with an odd deliberation to dress, carefully. She stood in front of the glass and arranged her hair. She did not permit herself to hurry. At last every detail of her toilet was complete. She might have been going down to breakfast in the sunshine; but outside all was dark, and within the house all was silent. Pressing her lips together, she took up her candle and opened her door. The corridor was black and empty.

She went to her husband's bedroom, turned the handle of his door and entered. She knew he would not be there, yet she glanced round vacantly, with a crushing sense of misery, on finding the room deserted, the bed untouched. In that brief moment of hesitation she decided what she was going to do. Emerging into the corridor again, she traversed it, turned to the left down another long passage, and presently stopped before the room occupied by Mrs. Aintree. She struck on the door twice without gaining an answer. Then she knocked louder. On this the door of the next room on the right opened and Mrs. Aintree stood in the aperture in a loose dressing-gown, looking white and weary. A dim light shone at her back, and a gasping sound of difficult breathing seemed to fill the lit space. The two women faced one another.

"What is it?" Mrs. Aintree whispered.

"Where is my husband?" Enid whispered back.

An expression of astonishment came into the other woman's eyes.

"Why do you come here to ask?" she said, still in a suppressed voice, and with a half-abstracted air of listening to the laboured breathing behind her.

"He is with you," Enid whispered passionately.

"I know it."

Mrs. Aintree did not even look angry. She sim-

ply stretched out her hand to Enid's, and with a curious sad dignity drew her into the dimly-lit room behind. Silently she pointed to the bed. Guy lay there. His eyes were closed. Through his white lips the breath forced itself with a loud, horrible sound. His eyelids quivered and pulsed, and his fleshless fingers twitched on the counterpane. Mrs. Aintree held Enid in front of the bed to gaze at him, grasping her hand with silent, cold vehemence. Then she spoke in a murmur :

"Now ask me to forgive you for what you have said."

Enid was seized with a great shame and a great terror. Tears rushed into her eyes. But she was selfish. She suddenly clung to the other woman as if for protection, and Mrs. Aintree held her for a moment close as she might have held a terrified child.

"Where can he be?" Enid uttered in a sob.

Mrs. Aintree did not reply. A low cry came from the bed. She sprang passionately towards it, and sank on her knees, holding her son's wasted hands.

And Enid stole out into the dark corridor alone.

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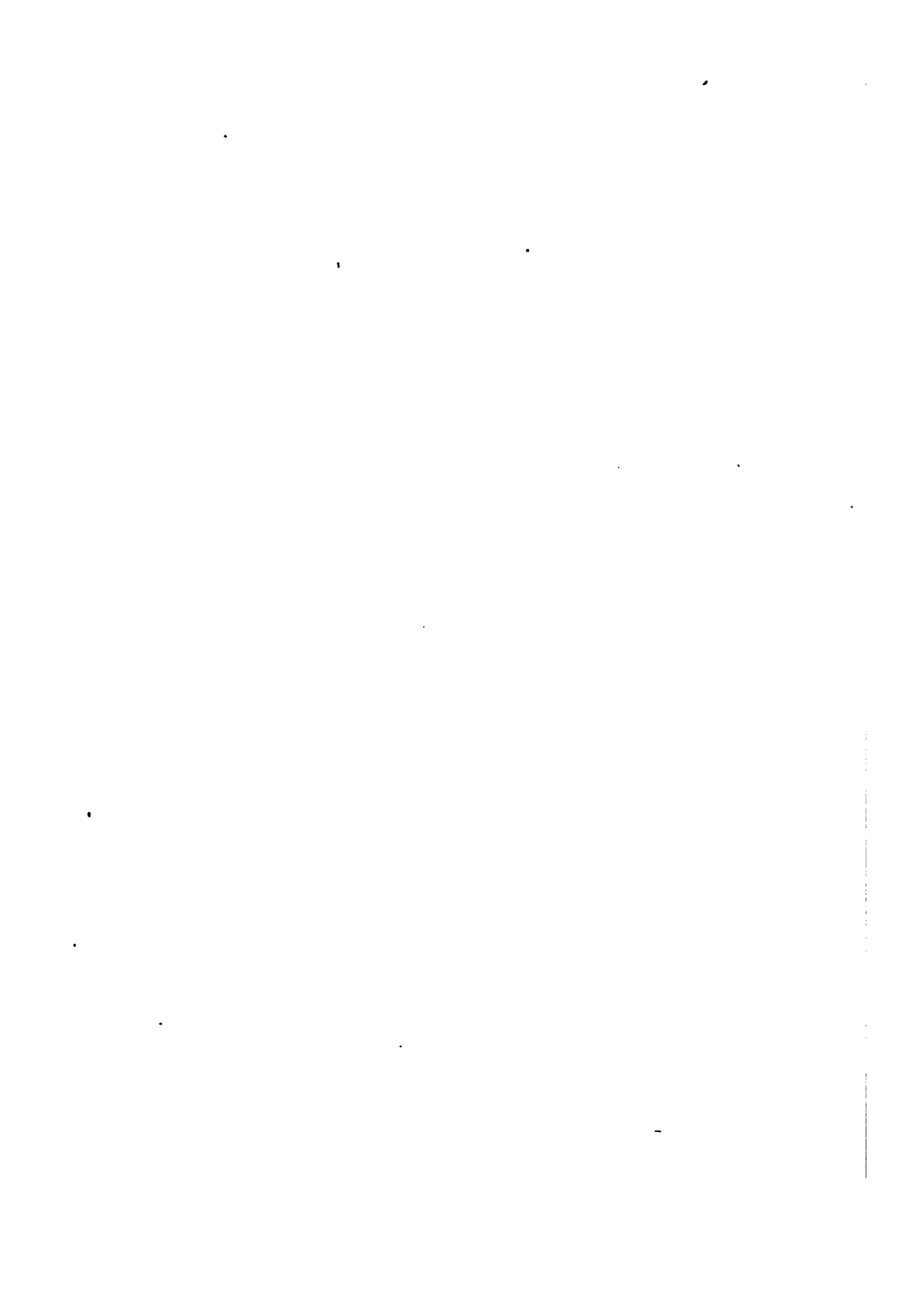
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